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THE CHILD OF STAFFERTON.

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ST. JOHN'S HOUSE, CLERKENWELL ROAD.

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THE

CHILD OF STAFFERTON

A Chapter from a Family Chronicle.

BY

W. J. KNOX LITTLE,

CANON RESIDENTIARY OF WORCESTER, AND VICAR OF HOAR CROSS, STAFFORDSHIRE.

AUTHOR OF "THE BROKEN VOW," ETC., ETC.

LONDON—CHAPMAN AND HALL,

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Dedication.

I DEDICATE THIS STORY

TO

MY DEAR SONS,

JACK AND ARTHUR,

IN MEMORY OF MANY HAPPY DAYS,

AND IN HOPE THAT OTHERS, NOT ALL UNLIKE THEM,

MAY YET BE OURS TOGETHER.

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PREFACE.

THE following story is a companion to "The Broken Vow." It was one of those trifles, spoken of in the preface to that little book, the composition of which served to while away some weary hours.

Like the other book it is also, in a sense, a romance, but it too is scarcely a *mere* romance, since incidents and persons mentioned in it have, to some extent, had their counterparts amidst "the changes and chances of this mortal life." Among those of my readers who dealt kindly with Lady Dorothy, I hope there may be some who will not refuse to feel some love for Lady May. If I have failed to show them her strength, simplicity and goodness, it is not her fault, it is mine. I hope that to many who treated the other little book

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with kindness this may give some pleasure, as its composition has been a source of pleasure to me. In any case I shall not feel that so trifling a thing has been altogether wasted time, if it help any in life's battles and sorrows to remember that sure happiness is found—amid whatever trouble—in the path of service for others, and of honour and truth and duty.

W. J. KNOX LITTLE.

THE COLLEGE,
Worcester.
April 26th, 1888.

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THE CHILD OF STAFFERTON.

PRELUDE.

It was real winter and bitter cold, when, only about a year and a half ago, I for the first time saw Ravensthorpe. I had often enough been invited to visit it, but somehow the thing never came off. Now at last I did go. We went by cross-country roads, and had a drive of some fifteen miles in the teeth of the cruel north wind. I was with young Ravensthorpe—Lady Dorothy's grandson—who by the death of his father had, some little time before, succeeded to the property. We have been friends for many a day, he and I, and in a sense we have been companions in arms. In plain words we have both been in the army, but I don't think he has once been in action, and I am quite sure that I—although I imagine that I have had the privilege of seeing some ghosts—have never seen the ghost of a battle.

I suppose we were both soldiers be-

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cause we each were born to broad acres and an ancient name, and under such circumstances it has been usually deemed necessary to keep the earlier years of noble manhood employed in a kind of busy idleness either in the army or at one of the universities.

However, we had known each other long before this visit, and yet now for the first time I was actually to see Ravensthorpe. This for many reasons was a great delight, but above all because I desired to see the portraits of Sir Walter and of the beautiful Lady Dorothy—his remarkable grandparents.

Then, too, I was much interested in the question of supersensuous appearances; and Ravensthorpe was a *locus classicus* for ghosts, and I had little doubt of the reality of dreams and apparitions sent often as calls from, and intimations of, the reality and nearness of another world.

I am not sure that Ravensthorpe shared or shares my beliefs, but he had an enthusiastic admiration for the character of his beautiful ancestress, and besides he was far too sensible to laugh at this kind of thing. Like the rest of his family he was a religious man, and he held the Catholic Faith in a clear, practical, Church of England way. He could never be a victim to that kind of confusion of

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thought, owing to which so many imagine that "spiritual" in fact means "unreal." He knew too well that spiritual facts are of an importance at least equal to material facts, but I think his natural temperament did not incline him to dwell upon a class of thoughts which had often been forced upon me.

Such things will, I imagine, always be accounted for in different ways. There are many minds which find themselves relieved from the fatiguing occupation of weighing evidence by the free employment of some ready and handy theory. In more serious matters it was thus that the lazy or stupid people of the Hume school settled the question of miracles by the useful formula "impossible;" thus, too, a venerable relative of my own used to account for all exceptional phenomena—the spraining of an ankle, the breaking of a leg, as well as the supposed appearance of a ghost—by the handy hypothesis or, in her case I should say, dogmatic statement—"My dear, it proceeds from the stomach," while *I* have been inclined to consider that the whole thing is a question of evidence.

Well, I was full of such thoughts *apropos* of Lady Dorothy, on this my first visit to Ravensthorpe. I can't say, however, that I saw any ghosts during

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that or my one or two subsequent visits. I suppose Lady Dorothy's goodness and her and Sir Walter's faithfulness have *laid* them all!

However, I did see Ravensthorpe, and I did see the picture. Each in its way is extremely beautiful. I saw also the motto, "*Avant Ravensthorpe jamais derrière.*" I had heard people say this was bad French; well, bad or good, there it was. I saw the church too, and the chantry and the tombs, and I also saw with a feeling of affectionate sadness, poor Cogsie's grave.

It was a very pleasant visit, and in some of our evening talks, when we drifted into family matters, Ravensthorpe questioned me as to the story of which he had got some hazy idea about the romantic circumstances which attended the marriage of my dear friend Lady May of Stafferton. To tell the truth, I thought Ravensthorpe a little stupid about it, for that dear downright stalwart soul—his own aunt—the younger Lady Dorothy—was mixed up in it a good deal, as you will see; but he was young at the time, and I dare say his good aunt thought he was as well without such romantic narratives when—in rather weak health—he was preparing for Eton,—and so kept most of it to herself.

I had exceptional opportunities—which I need not now explain—perhaps some day I

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may—for knowing all about it, and I had written the story as well as I could, so I lent him my manuscript to read, only warning him that it was much less supernatural and much more romantic than the story of *The Broken Vow*, to my thinking.

Stafferton is very dear to me, and so are its inmates, and though I could not tell the story after the manner of Lady Dorothy, I have told it to the best of my powers. Like hers, it is a story in which there is a touch of the preternatural; like hers too, a story of love and sorrow, but in which love, the purest and truest, was triumphant at last; like hers it had to do with a character of simple and beautiful goodness such as it does a man good to have known. "Truth," we all know, "is stranger than fiction," and there are strange enough incidents in this true history of my dear friends.

However, for what it is worth, here it is, and I have warned Ravensthorpe that if he ever make it known beyond his own immediate friends, he must change the names of persons and places, and other changes must be made, as I would be no party to hurting the feelings of living people by making them and their affairs public property.[1]

[1] N.B.—I can't help it now, but though his Lordship promised, I am not sure that he has *altogether* kept his word.—[Ed.]

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CHAPTER I.

EARLY DAYS.

Nobody knew exactly why Dr. Pendrell took the vacant "Grange" at Stafferton. It had been vacant for a long time, and the little village was full of interest and excitement when it was taken. There was a good deal of talk about it at first, and the gossips of the village were on the alert, but it all settled quietly down when it was known that the doctor was by birth a north countryman, and when it was remembered that in fact his father had been a dalesman. No one remembered Dr. Pendrell himself, not the oldest man of the parliament which sat night by night along the village bridge to discuss local matters and pass ethical judgments on all round the township. Still he was one of the Pendrells of the dale country, and so there could not be much wrong about him. When it was found moreover that the doctor was a kind and straightforward person, that he paid his bills, that he dealt largely with the local tobacconist, that he and his nephew went to church on Sunday, and that he seemed a thorough north countryman, and nohow put out either by

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the Vicar's high Church ways—which were now popular—and when, further, it was evident to all men that the doctor was a most welcome guest at the Court—Stafferton came to the sure conclusion that, though the act might appear a strange one, still if the doctor liked to take "T' Grange by t' beck," he had a right to do so, and no man need quarrel with him in consequence.

There were indeed serious questionings as to what manner of man the doctor's nephew might prove himself to be. His mother—so report said—was a foreigner, and though the lad was "a gradely lad," yet his hair was over-black, and his eyes too fiery in their coal-jet depths for a real Englishman, not but that he had an honest, cheery face, and a straight, strong manner which went far to winning even suspicious Yorkshire hearts. It was unpleasant to think that the old housekeeper whom the doctor brought with him was a foreigner and no mistake; what with her outlandish dress, and the jargon which she and Mr. Vincent—that was the doctor's nephew—talked betimes, and the fact that once and again old George, whom the doctor had engaged as his outdoor man, had to drive her off of a Sunday to the Popish church at Settlethorpe, there was much in her to make the heart of Staffer-

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ton sad. But after all she was a kindly woman, and she had business-like habits which won the Yorkshire heart, and if she didn't speak *their* language perfectly, she did speak enough to be understood, and a dialect almost as like ordinary English as their own; and she seemed a decent body, and nothing popish or heathenish in her ways, and at last won the confidence of all, then their respect.

There had been a time when the doctor's nephew had known himself as Guglielmo Vincente; but in Stafferton he was "Mr. Vincent," and the doctor called him "Will." No one could accuse *that* of an outlandish flavour, and although the old housekeeper had once recognized herself as Lucia Bicucci, when the doctor called her "Mrs. Bickerton," there did seem something homely and English about her which drew the fangs of suspicion surely.

Anyhow Dr. Pendrell did take the cottage by the beck, George Guchett, a Stafferton man, became his outdoor servant, and an honest, hard-working lass of a family in the dales was housemaid. Mrs. Bickerton—or "Lucia Nonna"—as Mr. Vincent called her—was cook, housekeeper and general ruler of the small establishment, and Mr. William Vincent, the nephew, settled down to live with his uncle. At first Stafferton was astonished, but before long the new household was

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respected as though they had lived there for ever, and indeed, humble as was the doctor's *ménage*, it was evident to all men before long that he and his nephew were people of importance, and that not only at Stafferton Court, but in all the country side they were "well liked" by the county families.

Although Dr. Pendrell was by race a dalesman, none the less it was a great change in his habits, this coming to live at Stafferton. Dr. Pendrell had been living in Italy for more than a quarter of a century. Young Vincent had never known father or mother, and his uncle had been both to him. And the earliest memories of the boy had been of places altogether unlike the wild moors of Stafferton.

He had indeed—coming upon him sometimes in strange and passing *whiffs*—the memory of a mountain home. Sometimes he fancied that he saw a very lovely and a very loving face bending over him, and dreamed that he remembered evenings when, hand in hand with some one who loved and caressed him, he wandered in an old city looking out upon hills of magic purple against a sky of dying gold. But these visions came only in a phantom fashion, and in the fantastic, unassorted way of strange dreams. Perhaps it was fact, perhaps it was fancy. He had never

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questioned his uncle much about it, and if he did approach the subject, the doctor seemed to turn aside.

But Vincent had some clear memories of tolerably early days.

The doctor had lived habitually in Rome. He had had a house in the Via Sistina, and all that was remembered well by his nephew. Many years before, he had been in attendance as medical adviser to noble families who wintered in Rome. A steady practice had grown up for him gradually among the English there. Every one who knew Rome knew him. He was respected and trusted. He interested himself in the welfare of the then English Church outside the Porta del Popolo, and was the close friend of the respected chaplain. He busied himself in all philanthropic objects. His establishment was small, but he was evidently a man in easy circumstances, and many pleasant evenings were spent by sojourners in Rome in Doctor Pendrell's house in the Via Sistina. Artists, noblemen, antiquarians, admiring English visitors, found their way there. The doctor was a devoted English Churchman, but he had not a touch of narrow Protestantism about him. He was a man of sense and culture, and a man of an eminently large and kindly nature. He was on easy terms of intimacy with many noble Roman families, and even

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with some of the higher ecclesiastics connected with the Vatican.

He took no part, of course, in the stormy politics which rent the eternal city in the opening days of Pio Nono's pontificate and the last years of the previous pontiff, but he had his own opinions. He viewed revolution with a certain conservative mistrust, but he made no secret in familiar conversation with his ecclesiastical friends that to his mind the temporal power—in spite of all the glamour thrown round it by a long tradition—was, as it then stood, a weakness to the religious mission of the Roman Church.

He was a kindly, religious, cultivated man, and his long residence abroad had freed him from all merely insular prejudice, while his thorough knowledge of Italian character, both in its strength and weakness, deepened that sympathy which all Englishmen, when they know Italy, cannot fail to feel towards the Italian people.

Dr. Pendrell had always been a clear-headed and religious English Churchman. Although respecting goodness wherever he found it, he had never had much sympathy certainly with that party in the English Church, who, while professedly believing in the Prayer-book, really held a bald and puritan belief far below its Catholic teaching, and consequently he hailed with joy the great movement emanating from

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Oxford, by which the true teaching and position of the English Church were re-asserted with such admirable effect; and, in later days, he naturally found no difficulty in throwing his influence on the side of the younger men of the movement in England, who applied to the people in Catholic worship of an English type, the principles taught by the great Oxford Fathers. With what might be called merely fussy or fidgety ritualism, he had no sympathy at all.

Those who knew the doctor well gradually became aware that his home party included a nephew—a child then of four or five years old—who bore an Italian name. It was believed somehow that the doctor had had a sister who was dead, and who had married an Italian, Guglielmo Vincente. The doctor was not a man to speak much of his private affairs; he never cast doubt upon such a supposition; he spoke of his little nephew naturally, and when English ladies visited him, the child was petted and made much of in the usual fashion, and Guglielmo Vincente, as his nurse Lucia Bicucci called him, was by degrees accepted as Master Vincent, and then young Mr. Vincent, Dr. Pendrell's nephew. It became evident to all men that the doctor was wrapped up in the boy. In their home such words as "uncle" and "nephew" were never permitted, but were replaced by the more affectionate

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titles "father" and "son," though Will, in schoolboy fashion, often substituted the affectionate Latin "pater" for the more serious "father."

In this way Will's early days were very happy in Rome. He knew the Eternal City as the place of his childhood, and loved it with more than that affection even, which all who know the Eternal City cannot fail to feel for the strange old place.

Rome enchains the affections. No one knows why. All feel the spell. Even now, when under the new Government the old place puts on a partially young appearance; when, partly from stress of circumstances, partly, perhaps, from childish impulse to follow French fashions, rows of new streets, and—what is more tiresome to the artist's taste—modern and commonplace customs, rise all round with mushroom luxuriance, still Rome is Rome. In the days of Vincent's childhood and boyhood the old city wore all its antique and picturesque appearance. Cardinals rolled about in antediluvian coaches with hangers on in quaintest uniforms; the Easter Benediction was still given from the *Loggia;* and the Holy Father himself, driving or walking with his usual attendants, was no uncommon sight. The *pifferari* played their mountain ditties before the enshrined *Madonnas*, the models lounged in lazy picturesqueness on the steps of the Trinità de

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Monti, the silver trumpets sounded from the dome at the Easter Festival, the Carnival was mad and natural when Lent was approaching, and the swarm of whining beggars at all the church doors plied their trade.

Will Vincent had learnt to love the Rome of those days with an affection which never changed. Though the child had no real playfellow, he was a happy child. His uncle loved him with that tender, wise affection of which strong and unselfish natures are capable, and old Lucia, who had been with him from his birth, had all the added love so often found in a faithful nurse. Lucia was a loving woman, but she was not a weak one, and the little boy grew to love her warmly, but he never attempted to disobey.

Besides the bright and cultivated home in the Via Sistina, Will's early memories were full of the yearly *Villeggiatura* which came as regularly as the return of July. Once, for the child's health seemed to need it, the doctor went for sea breezes to Porto d'Anzio, but the villa was uncomfortable, and the stay was shortened accordingly. Once, for a longer time, some weeks were spent at Viareggio, and many a happy hour Will spent with his uncle, wandering in the vast *Pineta,* and listening to the wind singing among the pines. But the doctor had many years before become the posses-

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sor of a *Vigna*, and a little mountain home under the ledges of the Apennines, near Gubbio, and the wild and jagged mountain, and the far-stretching fertile plain, and the terraces of the old upland city covered with churches and palaces, and the solemn cypresses and old brown houses,—all these, in the soft Italian summer, made sweet by the fresh mountain breezes, wove themselves into the boy's fancies, and gave form to the creatures created in his dreams.

There was not a path on the hill-sides around Gubbio, not an alley in the old town itself, which Vincent did not know before he was twelve years old.

Children naturally gain a tone from those they habitually live with. The doctor was a real student, and he had an artist's eye. It was a delight to him to share his pleasures with the lad who was dear to him as a son. He discoursed to him on the fine pictures, some of which are never wanting in any old Italian town. There were few of the stories of strange adventures in which Middle Italy is so rich that the doctor did not relate to the boy. "He is half Italian," he used to say, "and he ought to know the history of his mother land." In particular the lad's imagination was touched by the sweet, sad story of Federigo di Montefeltro and his wife the Lady Battista. Piero della Francesca has painted their portraits. She was

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only six-and-twenty at her death—so the doctor told Will—learned and beautiful beyond all women of her time. She had prayed, so it was said, that she might bear a son worthy of his father, and had offered her life that it might be so. A strange dream seemed to warn her that the prayer and offering were accepted. The boy was born, but his mother's life was the price of his; and when the heart-broken father, hearing of her danger, hurried back to Gubbio, it was only in time to soothe her dying moments, and receive from her hands his only son. Thus, then, in the folk-lore of Mountain Italy, and in happy memories of his Roman home, William Vincent was reared.

But Dr. Pendrell did not fail to feel that his adopted son was also of English blood. Public school life he believed, and justly, was the best thing for the boy, and the old quiet life in Italy at last came to an end. Vincent was sent to Winchester; in holiday time he joined his uncle in Italy, or spent the vacation weeks with him in London; but as the time drew on, and he went to Oxford, the doctor's desire to deepen in his nephew the sense of his English origin seemed to increase; the house in the Via Sistina was let, a care-taker ruled in the villa at Gubbio, and the doctor and his nephew settled at Stafferton.

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CHAPTER II.

STAFFERTON.

NOTHING could be less like Italy than the country round Stafferton. Nothing of its kind, however, could be more beautiful.

The little village with dark-brown stone houses and quaint square gardens—bright in spring and summer with many flowers—straggles down either side of a rushing stream—or "beck," as they call it there—which, gathering waters from the upper moors, tosses and tumbles in whirls and eddies under bridge after bridge to the valley below.

At the head of the village stands the ancient Church, dominated by a strong square tower, and surrounded by a quiet churchyard with many graves. Behind the village rise almost abruptly range on range of wild moorland hills. Here the heather is deep for mile on mile of splendid desolation, and the only sounds are the bleatings of wandering sheep, the rumble of subterranean waters, the crowing of the grouse, and the sighs of the wander-

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ing winds. The moors rise here and there into jagged peaks of mountain dignity, and are divided by deep and narrow dales.

Down the sides of these the verdure is abundant, and the mountain ash and waving pines, and gnarled and troubled stunted oaks cling and wander in clefts and crannies. Ferns of all sorts and nameless mountain shrubs make an undergrowth rich in leaf and colour, and by the beck-side in spring and summer wild flowers grow in luxuriant beauty, and wild strawberries find their life.

Just behind the churchyard stretches up one of those mountain gullies, down which rushes the stream from its springs in the upper moorland, and through which sweep in unresisted violence the winter winds.

Looking up the village street,—if street it can be called which at least in summer is more like a shady lane with scattered houses and a laughing stream,—the upper moors break off in something like precipitous boldness, and the edges which strike against the sky-line are stern and rugged scaurs. Immediately on the right, at the head of the village, and on the opposite side of the beck from the Church, stands back a venerable irregular mansion, surrounded with small fir-trees, and having quaint gables and stone-stanchioned windows,—all that remains of a middle-age

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grange. In front is a small smooth carpet of lawn grass; a short avenue leads to a gate opening lower down into the village, and through the fir-wood higher up a narrow footpath ends in a wicket-gate which opens opposite á rustic bridge, to cross which leads to a stile entering the churchyard. This was Dr. Pendrell's Yorkshire home.

To the left of the village the moors break away in wide sweeps towards the north-west, and under their shelter and between them and the village stretch miles of beautiful park. Here the shelter is so thorough that no park of southern England can be more rich in soft green turf and stately timber, while the jagged scaurs and wild heather-clad hills behind rise bold and threatening, so that the contrast between the wild and cultivated scenery is complete.

One main entrance is through stately gates opening a few yards below the Church, and leading by a drive of no great distance to the house, while another closes a long avenue which skirts the bases of the hills, and leads the traveller far down in the valley, out on the high road to Settlethorpe.

At a point high up, yet still under the shelter of the surrounding moors, stands Stafferton Court. It dates from the reign

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of Elizabeth. It is built in the brown stone of the country. The long frontage, broken by quaint obtruding windows and irregularly placed gables and buttresses, is flanked at either end with advancing wings. One of these—that on the right of the traveller who looks the house in the face—has been carried back to a considerable distance behind the main body of the house, and the windows here are modern; roses and climbing shrubs so cover it, however, that the beauty of the rear view of the old Court is not spoilt by this more recent addition. At the other end a quaint irregular gabled tower rises, strong and grim, and gives a fine effect of dignity and age to the front view, and in fact is of much more ancient workmanship than any other part of the house.

The back of the Court is beautiful, though not so consistent in style as the front. There is a wide expanse of velvet turf with beds of exquisite flowers, and further back on the hillside rises terrace after terrace broad and stately, with flower-beds and fountains; gray flights of steps ascend up and up until the last is crowned with a luxuriance of woods where the winds wail in winter, and in summer the birds sing, until farther still the traveller begins to notice how the trees are *burnt* with storm and bent with the north-west

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wind, and grow thinner and more ragged until at last they cease altogether, and the rich shrubberies seem to melt imperceptibly into the wild and wind-swept moor.

Stafferton Court could probably have told strange stories of early border wars. But ever since the days of the Tudors and the Charleses it has had a sufficiently strange history. For many, many centuries it has been the northern home of the Durrells. They had been in their time a strong, fierce family. They had been mixed up with many historical struggles, but somehow neither here nor in Heath Cross —their seat in the Midlands—had they in all their vicissitudes of fortune lost an acre of the ancestral estates.

This was the more remarkable, for one deep shadow rested upon their family records. Doubtless such shadows deepen by the touch of fancy and tradition, still there it was; and in modern times—as sin is wont to have—it had its consequences.

The story went that in the time of Elizabeth the family was represented by a doughty knight who had twelve strong sons. Of these the eldest of course inherited. This eldest was by name William, and his next brother was Hugh. These two names seemed almost regularly to alternate in the heads of the house.

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Hugh was a man of fierce temper and a firm will. In the troubles regarding the Queen of Scots he had more than once almost been involved in serious difficulties, owing to his habit of mixing himself up with plotters against Queen Elizabeth's government. Both brothers loved one lady. It was said that Hugh was the accepted suitor, but that at last the lady, terrified by the wild, fierce ways of her lover, transferred her affections and gave her hand to his more gentle brother.

Hugh's affection had been strong, and his nature was fiery and uncontrolled. He swore a dreadful oath that, even if sorrow came of it, no child of his faithless love should ever be Master of Stafferton. One child—a boy—and one only was born of Sir William's marriage. All things went well, the curse and the oath were forgotten. The child reached the age of five years, a beautiful boy, the pride of his parents. It so happened that in their absence on political and Court matters in London the child disappeared. Hugh rested under dark suspicion, but he succeeded in proving to his brother's satisfaction that he was at the time far from Stafferton, and protested his horror and sorrow at the great calamity. Some months afterwards the body of a child of about the age of the young heir was said

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to have been found in a cleft in the fells. It was reported that from exposure the features were quite unrecognizable, but that an antique gold cross worn by *the* child had been found upon the little body. It was supposed that the child had wandered alone on the moors, had been surprised by a storm which had burst over the hills with unusual violence, and had fallen over the cliffs and been killed.

A coffin in which the little disfigured body was supposed to have been placed was buried with solemn pomp. The private chapel at Stafferton, which stands a little south of the great tower, and is entered by a long, irregular connecting passage from the library—was built at the time, and here a monumental tomb was begun of rare beauty, which, it was intended, should be finished in memory of "the Child of Stafferton."

Sir William did not long survive his son. Lady Durrell lived long enough—a broken-hearted woman—to see the chapel completed, though not the tomb, and she rests there side by side with her husband, and near the then half-finished tomb which had been begun to the memory of her child.

Sir Hugh succeeded to property and title. During the short remainder of her life he left his sister-in-law in undisturbed possession of Stafferton, while he himself

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lived at Heath Cross. Those who had suspicions of him attributed this to remorse and fear; those who believed him innocent put it down to generous affection, and to the memory of his early love. The Dowager Lady Durrell never saw him again, and to the close of her life she connected in her mind the death of her child with the anger and unforgiving jealousy of Sir Hugh.

When Sir Hugh was left as head of the family he did not seem to have gained much happiness from his accession. He had two sons, but he was an unkind father. The elder died when he was one-and-twenty, the younger afterwards succeeded to the title. He had, however, quarrelled with his father long before the death of the latter, and they were never reconciled. Sir Hugh was seldom at Stafferton. When he was, men said he never slept at night, but wandered in the library, or up the staircases to the tower above, or in and out of the chapel. At these times servants declared they heard fierce words and cries of pain, and then the old man was heard to move about and groan and mutter as though not in his right senses. He was a fierce, headstrong man. Few men loved his company, and none dared to contradict him. He died an old man, but with great suddenness. He was found

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sitting erect and dead, with a look of agonized horror upon his face, in the great chair by the fireplace in the library at Stafferton.

Men noticed that this took place on the eve of S. John, and that that was the anniversary of "the child's" death, and that on that night there had been a violent storm of thunder with heavy rain upon the moors.

But though he was dead—if popular report spoke truly—he was not at peace under the chapel floor. Men said that in the library were still to be heard the heavy step and muttering groans of old Sir Hugh; some went so far as to assert that they had seen him when the house was lonely in still night hours, and report declared that any sorrow or calamity to the family of Durrell was sure to be preceded by the apparition of a phantom child, raising its arms in entreaty, and flying, and crying as in pain.

Several curious consequences followed these mysterious events. By tradition, from those old Elizabethan days, the heir of the Durrells, whoever he might be, was always called, as by a sort of title, "the Child of Stafferton." Male heir had never failed, and yet from that day to this the family had never gone in regular and direct sequence. If an elder son

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succeeded he was sure to have no male heir. Where a younger brother followed him, he invariably lost his elder son before his own death. So it had gone. At the date of our story the family seemed at last to be extinct. Sir Hugh Durrell, the then possessor of estates and title, was apparently the last of his race.

He had descended from one of the younger brothers of old Sir Hugh, and he had no son—indeed, no child—and his younger and only brother was dead. Thus there was no "Child of Stafferton." The entail of the property was altogether on heirs male, and as matters stood at the beginning of our story, the present Sir Hugh was free to leave his great wealth and his broad acres to whom he would.

Who their fortunate possessor was likely to be, none could doubt.

Sir Hugh had married late in life the young Dowager Countess of Mannerton. It was said he had admired her long before her marriage with Lord Mannerton; be that as it may, within two years after her husband's death he had married her. Lady Mannerton had one child by her first marriage—a girl, a mere child at the time of her mother's second marriage. At the opening of this story Lady May Roseby was scarcely seventeen, she looked quite two years younger, though in mind and

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character she was far beyond her years. No one could have imagined a greater contrast than she was to every recorded member of the Durrell family. They were dark enough to have suggested Spanish or Italian blood, and the portrait of "old Sir Hugh" which hangs in the entrance-hall at Stafferton, taken when he was young, and before storms of passion had marred his beauty, is more or less like them all. Lady May Roseby was like an embodied sunbeam. Large liquid violet eyes, masses of brown hair, sunned over with gold, a fair, clear complexion, and a mouth which seemed always ready to break into a sunny smile—it is possible to enumerate features, but who can paint the ineffable grace of life and brightness in such as she?

Her laugh was so soft and genuine and joyous, her step so light, her sweet voice so always singing, that old Stafferton lost its gloom, and every one in or around it felt like the bursting of an early summer when Lady May came there.

She loved Stafferton, and consequently the family were now far more at Stafferton than they ever used to be. She loved the old house, she loved the fresh freedom of the open moors, she loved the rough, kindly northern ways. She was a great horsewoman, and found company everywhere in

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stream, or stone, or heather, in flying cloud and rising wind, when she was out for her afternoon rides, alone or with Sir Hugh, in the dales and moor-side of Stafferton. Lady Mannerton was a gentle, amiable, languid, rather selfish woman. She had many points of strength in her character, fatally neutralized by a certain languor and dislike to taking trouble. She had had her sorrows, but she could make no home for sadness when Lady May was with her. Sir Hugh was a pompous, somewhat tiresome man, not unkindly, but with no great breadth of understanding or depth of nature, very proud of his family, very tenacious of his rights, very obstinate and often very foolish, but in Lady May's hands he became a genial, happy, cordial old gentleman.

The roughest dalesman loved her, every woman in the village knew her, and felt the power of her sweetness. She was scarcely more than a child, but she was already mistress of all hearts in and near Stafferton. It was, I suppose, perfect simplicity, entire self-forgetfulness, together with ready sympathy, and a strong and tender heart, to say nothing of her quick intelligence and her sweet face, that brought all the world to her feet. Certain it is, no one could help feeling her charm. It touched every one in an

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inexplicable way. Such beautiful goodness won all who knew her.

She charmed you then, and filled your heart with joy and love. It always was so. I have no doubt, whoever is near her, it is so now.

"I infer
'Twas her thinking of others, made you think of her."
Sweet May.

Such was Stafferton, and so stood Stafferton Court when Doctor Pendrell and his adopted son came to take up their residence in the old grange by the beck-side. Sir Hugh Durrell and Lady Mannerton had long given up all hope of an heir, but Sir Hugh had almost ceased to regret it, and so deeply had Lady May penetrated his heart—for she always looked upon him as a father—that he, like all the world, with ready acquiescence had learnt to look upon her as "the Child of Stafferton."

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CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST VISION.

It was in the August of 18— that Dr. Pendrell and Will Vincent came to live in Stafferton. Will was nineteen at the time. Since he had left Winchester and gone to Oxford he had spent part of a winter in Italy. Here he was always at home, but he was Englishman enough by birth and education to be glad to come with his uncle to Stafferton in the first days of a lovely August.

The doctor had chosen August for the time of arrival because of the attractions of the place. For some reason or other he had an ardent desire that his nephew should love it, and at no time in the year, perhaps, is Stafferton so beautiful as in the glow of an English August.

When England has a real summer, Nature then and there does probably the very best she can. The sense of home, the sense of peace, the sense of poetry, the sense of freshness and sweetness, of all that is fairest and purest in human nature are satisfied then. It is so in happy, hilly,

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soft, green Shakespearian Middle England, with its deep-green meadows and soft hedgerows and flowing streams, with its hayfields and its lowing cattle and bushy woods, with its feathery elm or wide, majestic, oak-woods; Worcestershire or Warwickshire, or Northampton or Stafford—these are terrestrial paradises in a real English summer.

But nowhere in England is deep summer more perfect than in the solemn valleys, with their clean, quaint villages, which run up into the northern moors. And no valley is fairer than the Vale of Settlethorpe, and no village more characteristic of the attractions of North England than Stafferton. There you have soft green meadows under the shelter of frowning crags, and timber unsurpassed in the Midlands, close to the wild, weird pines of the mountain; and above all, miles and miles of trackless wastes of heather, where the bee hums, and the wild curlew calls, and the grouse crows, and the wide carpet of russet-purple lies rich and shot with many hues of changing colour beneath the over-arching heavens of blue and gold.

Dr. Pendrell was by birth a man of the dales, and he and his had long been familiarly acquainted with the Durrells: Sir Hugh—the present owner of Stafferton Court—had had one brother, William

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by name. William's record of life had not been altogether happy. He was a man of a headstrong and fiery spirit, and had united the roving tastes of the sportsman with the character of mingled sadness and brightness which is the sorrowful heritage of an artist born.

William had not fallen in with the wishes and plans of his father. The heads of the house of Durrell were mostly men who could not brook contradiction. "When Greek meets Greek" we all know the inevitable consequence, and William Durrell and his father had unhappily quarrelled. The young man had persisted with an obstinacy which was quite on a par with his father's in his own line. He had declined to entertain a project of advantageous marriage which his father had urged upon him with—it is true—little tact or temper—for the Durrells had always looked upon matrimonial arrangements as affairs for the head of the house to settle, and not as matters to be determined by the heart. William Durrell had taken his own line. He had declined an honourable but onerous profession in England, had settled down into a wandering life in Italy, had lived with sufficient economy in Rome and Perugia on the allowance made him by his father, and had gratified his artistic tastes with brush and pencil in that land where

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brush and pencil find work enough to do when guided by an artist's hand.

Some of his pictures had commanded applause. But his father considered that the house of Durrell was disgraced by the mere achievements of a wandering painter, and he had never seen his son again.

On the death of old Sir William, the elder son—Sir Hugh—had been kind to his Italianized brother. His allowance had been continued, correspondence between the brothers had been kept up, but from the time of the younger leaving his native country they had never met.

William had died suddenly at Perugia within a few months of his father; and as it was known that if he died unmarried and without issue, the last of the Durrells was gone, Sir Hugh had gradually settled down to the thought that Lady May Roseby—the child of his wife—must henceforth be considered as "the Child of Stafferton."

In the earlier years of William Durrell's residence in Italy, Dr. Pendrell had been the medium of communication between father and son. The doctor had been a devoted friend to William Durrell, and had striven earnestly but in vain to effect a reconciliation. Once only had William been at Stafferton since first he had left it. He obtained his father's leave, through the intercession of Dr. Pendrell and his

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brother, to visit the old place for a few nights in the course of a flying visit to England, only—as it happened—a day or two before his father's death, and—as it proved—only nine months before his own.

Sir Hugh Durrell, a man of a calmer disposition and more conventional habit of mind, a man of a much more shallow heart and narrow understanding than his artist brother, had yet cherished for him a sincere affection. He was well aware of Dr. Pendrell's kindness, and he was glad, —when the doctor expressed a desire to reside, during the term of his nephew's education, in the North of England,—to be in a position to make some return for all the benefits reaped by William from his friendship, and to offer him at a merely nominal rent the old Grange at Stafferton as his English home.

August was the time when the doctor came. He did so, as we have said, that Stafferton might wear its best dress, and show in its most attractive loveliness to his adopted son.

William Vincent had been, after his fashion, a sportsman in Italy. He was now eighteen; he had first come to England to prepare for Winchester when he was thirteen; and English blood in his veins, and English customs around him, had taught him to love sport in England, in

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an English fashion. To such a lad the grouse moors of Stafferton from the 12th of August were lands of paradise.

That summer was spent by the Durrells at Heath Cross and on the Continent. And Sir Hugh was glad to place Doctor Pendrell and his nephew in entire command of his moors during the shooting season. A shooting-box belonged to the Durrells some twelve miles higher up than Stafferton, at Morton-in-Herblesdale. It was little more than a brown stone house, low and long, roofed with gray flags, and having some stanchioned windows, within a stone's throw of the hamlet of Morton, and in the very heart of the wildest moors.

Here William Vincent and his Uncle spent the loveliest August and September that England could give.

It was not, of course, a large conventional shooting party; but from time to time, for a week or ten days together, Vincent had with him young men who had been his friends at Winchester or Oxford, and some to whom Sir Hugh Durrell desired to give some chance at the grouse.

And who but those who know them can have a thought of the joy of the grouse moors in August? The early bath in the mountain stream, the day with gun in hand across the open moors, the freshness of the

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breeze, the spring of the elastic heather, the healthy exercise, the free and good fellowships on the moorside at luncheon, and in the bright evening the genial company and pleasant talk when tired and satisfied the shooters gathered home.

Summer passed, autumn came—the wild clear autumn of the north,—the doctor and his nephew fairly settled down at Stafferton. For a few weeks the family were there in October, but William was then drawing towards the close of his career at Oxford. Life went quietly at the Grange and silently at the Hall, and winter passed and early spring was with them before William Vincent had seen Sir Hugh or any of his household.

At last they met. For some reason Doctor Pendrell had long looked forward with anxiety to that meeting, and indeed, whatever the doctor's wishes about it may have been, it was big with future fortunes of joy and sorrow to all concerned.

It was a memorable day and one that Vincent remembered always. It was in March. The mornings had been chill and changeful, with showers of sleet and hail. By mid-day it had faired, and the moors were covered with gathering clouds, but the woods of the park and the great walls of crag above were glaring with sunlight. Sir Hugh had called at the Grange the day

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before, and finding Vincent out at the time, had expressed a wish that the young man should come to make his acquaintance. For some reason the doctor seemed to his nephew nervously anxious about this visit.

"You will be sure to be in time, Will," he had said. "Three o'clock was the hour named."

"Why, father, it won't matter if it is five minutes before or after, will it? It must be very urgent, you seem so anxious."

"No, my boy, no, not anxious, only you see"—and the doctor fidgetted a book in and out of his study book-case—"their family and ours have been such old friends, I want you to know them."

Will Vincent did ring at the great door of the Court as nearly as possible at the hour named. As he asked the footman if his master were in, Sir Hugh himself was crossing the hall and came forward to meet him.

"Mr. Vincent, I believe. I am glad to welcome you, though I fancy by this time you know Stafferton almost as well as I do. Your uncle's family and mine are old friends."

"I am very glad to have the honour of meeting you, sir," said the young man. "I have to thank you much for your kindness. Thanks to you, we have had a very pleasant time at Stafferton."

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They were moving towards the drawing-room when a voice called from the top of the great staircase,—

"Father, dear, *are* you ever coming? I have been all round the garden looking for you. Do come, it's so fine now out on the moors—Oh! I beg your pardon," for the speaker had come rushing down the staircase, and suddenly paused as she saw the stranger with Sir Hugh.

Vincent also paused, and looked up, and then for the first time he saw May Roseby.

There she stood, suddenly pausing on the staircase and gazing down upon him. She was a mere child, only just seventeen, but she looked even considerably younger. She was dressed in a quiet winter walking dress; a little plain black cloak, fitting loosely, drawn in slightly at the waist with broad black ribbon, and round the neck and along the edge of the cape trimmed with fur. On her head was a small velvet hat, with, in front, a little soft curling fur plume. Her masses of golden-brown hair hung loosely over her shoulders, and were prettily tossed and tumbled by the wind; one hand was resting on the balustrade of the staircase, and in the other she was twisting a half-blown rose. Her fair face was slightly flushed with excitement, and her large deep-violet eyes were brim-

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full, as always, of unshed tears. There was the shadow of a mischievous laugh about her mouth, half fading away—a sweet picture it was of youth and innocence and beauty.

Vincent was an artist in eye and nature, he was an Italian *and* he was an Englishman, he was also barely over twenty, and as his eyes met hers he was riveted by the vision, taking in every detail with the quick perception of a real artist, but struck through and through by the loveliness of the living whole.

"What a lovely little creature!" he found himself murmuring to himself; and his face must have showed his undisguised admiration, for Lady May blushed slightly and paused and smiled. There was something more, though, in her look than the expression of half-consciousness at his admiring gaze, there was startled astonishment. She paused, looked over him at something beyond, and then looked at his face again as if trying to read a riddle.

Such situations are long in telling, they are swift in act. Souls do not count their actions by beats of time, they are too great in their eternal dignity. A glance is sometimes enough between them when by fate or nature they are kindred, and Vincent, with all the ardent Italian life in him coming uppermost, supported by all the

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depth of feeling of the Englishman he was, would probably have said there and then to his own heart, without waiting to question himself too closely, that he loved May Roseby; and May would have said frankly to any one who chose to inquire that she liked Mr. Vincent.

The pause had been slight, but there *had* been a pause.

"May, darling, Mr. Vincent, Dr. Pendrell's nephew, or son, I think he considers him, whom you have heard of. Mr. Vincent, my daughter, Lady May Roseby," interrupted Sir Hugh.

The pause had been just perceptible, and May stretched down her hand to Vincent, with "I *beg* your pardon, how rude of me, but"—and she stopped again—"it *is* so funny,"—and she looked over Vincent's head to the opposite wall. "Look, father, he's the image of old Sir Hugh, and"—and then she laughed with such joyous amusement that Vincent could not help but join—"it's the very dress, shooting-coat and all, that I dreamt I had seen Sir Hugh in. Father, don't you remember?"

The two gentlemen turned to the object to which May's eyes directed them, and indeed they both were startled. It was a full-length likeness of a young man of about Will's age. The hair was black, the forehead high and white, the eyes very dark and overshadowed by well-marked

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black eyebrows, the features regular and the mouth, though perhaps large, yet firm. The shoulders were broad and the whole form strong, but the lips were thin, and there was something about the meeting of the lips that gave an unpleasant sense not merely of determination but of unkindness. It was certainly the picture of a very handsome man, and the quaint and picturesque dress of Elizabeth's time set off the figure to perfection. But as far as Will had any remembrance of his own appearance it certainly *was* like him.

Sir Hugh looked for a moment and then exclaimed, "May's right! You are the image of him, it is very remarkable."

"You will forgive me for being so rude, but the funny thing is, I dreamt about Sir Hugh, and he had exactly your shooting-jacket and a cap just like yours, and the knickerbockers, and the stockings, and the whole thing. Didn't I tell you, father?"

"My dear child, how you do run on! You must excuse her, Mr. Vincent."

But Will had burst into a merry laugh; he felt already as if he had known Lady May for years. "I have nothing to excuse, sir," he said. "I am flattered that her ladyship should dream of me."

It might have been a merely conventional phrase and a stupid politeness in ordinary

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men, but Vincent had a pretty Italian grace in movement and a pleasant English frankness in speech, which gave to his words a wholly other aspect. There is a way of doing everything, and it is the way which makes all the difference.

"Thank you," said May, looking up at him and laughing, for she was now standing beside them in the hall. "Only the worst is it wasn't you, it was only your clothes. But indeed, father, Mr. Vincent *is* like him; only I am glad," she added, laughing and turning to Will, "you have got a more goodnatured mouth. It isn't *quite* nice being like Sir Hugh, he was horribly wicked like all their ancestors. Dear, dear, father," she laughed, putting both her hands round the baronet's arm and laying her head against him—isn't it so, your people were very cruel and wicked? Now wasn't Sir Hugh bad?"

"Quiet, puss," Sir Hugh laughed, patting her cheek; "*de mortuis*, you know. Come, never mind my ancestors, where's *your* mother, which is more to the point?"

Lady Mannerton was in the drawing-room. She was a handsome, kind, stately woman at first meeting. She was glad to make Mr. Vincent's acquaintance; she had heard much of his uncle's kindness to her poor brother-in-law, and hoped they would both be happy at Stafferton.

"And what were you making all that

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noise about, my darling?" asked her mother of Lady May.

"Oh, father will tell you. It was very odd, it was all Mr. Vincent," and then she and Sir Hugh bade good-bye, going off for their walk, and as Sir Hugh paused on the path leading from the drawing-room window to speak to a gardener, and May went on before him, still twirling her rose, and knocking her stick upon the ground, Vincent heard Lady Mannerton's questions as to Oxford as if in a dream, but with all his being he heard May's voice come out of a soul full of girlish innocence and joy,—

"Wild birds warble far and near,
Bees are softly humming;
Welcome every sound I hear,
Summer days are coming."

If ever a spirit of pure gladness spoke, it spoke thus in Mendelssohn's song of innocent joy.

Vincent stayed for a few minutes and then left, after promising that he and his uncle would dine at the Court that evening. Stafferton was a new place to him as he walked away. He may have been very foolish, but he was half Italian as well as half English, and he was scarcely over twenty.

Ah! young untroubled life, why not revel in a world of dream? Reality comes soon enough to break the spell!

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CHAPTER IV.

DREAMING AND WAKING.

WILL and his uncle did dine at the Court that night. It was the first of many quiet pleasant evenings spent by them, or at any rate by one of them, there. The Rector was not the only guest beside themselves, though he, like themselves, was a very constant guest.

Mr. Mothley—"the old Rector" as he was affectionately called by his people—was one of those men, real ornaments to any Church, who are found in some English rectories. He was now an old man, and indeed in appearance patriarchal. His long white beard and quiet, pale face, his benign expression of mingled kindness and humour, won the heart at once.

Men without a touch of humour in them are likely to have something about them very bad or very sad. The darkest cloud has some rift of light, or anyhow a lining of silver, and human life and human society is dark enough, but one aspect of it is sufficiently comic to relieve the burden of its otherwise insupportable sorrowfulness. The old Rector had that look of intense sadness about him which springs from

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the habitual cast of a serious mind gazing very earnestly at the sorrowful side of life; but there was a kindly light about his eye and a suggestion of a smile about the corners of his mouth, speaking of a soul not so wrapt about with the thought of human sorrow as to be incapable of enjoying the humour of life's strange, almost grotesque situations.

The only other guest was also a clergyman. He was shaped in a wholly other mould. He was not without respect for Mr. Mothley, the kind of respect that a weak man must feel for a strong one, and that a kindly-natured though shallow man must have for one whose whole nature, strong and full of fibre, is steeped in divine charity.

Mr. Blake was evidently an extreme Protestant. His religious opinions consisted chiefly, not so much in a positive creed, as in a watchful suspicion of all men's opinions. The Pope he considered pre-eminently Antichrist, and a Dissenter seemed to him little better. The Anglican Prayer-book he had probably accepted at his ordination without any shade of mental reservation, for the simple reason that he was very slightly acquainted with it, and that he received it *en bloc* without demur and without question in the *cela-va-sans-dire* temper in which a man receives the light and the air.

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Sir Hugh Durrell was exceedingly kind to him, and he liked the hospitalities of Stafferton Court. He had a secret fear that Mr. Mothley had somewhere a private treaty with Rome; and that he held a doctrine of "justification by lighted candles," but Mr. Mothley was courteous and kind to him, and he was the Rural Dean, and his commanding character, his imperative decisiveness, his thorough goodness, and—last but not least—his benign and patriarchal appearance, weighed so much with him, that he never inquired too closely into the terms of that secret treaty, or that soul-destroying doctrine, nor had he occasion to visit his church, where he had a haunting fear that the services were "Popish."

The conversation at dinner was very general. The politics of the moment, county affairs, matters relating to the village, and improvements in the cottages, in which Sir Hugh was interested, engrossed the attention of all. Will Vincent was very silent and—the atmosphere being new to him—he was shy but attentive. Lady Mannerton talked to him a little about Winchester and Oxford, about books which he had been reading, about Italy and about his sport on the moors. He was really much engrossed with furtively watching Lady May. She was full of fun

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with Mr. Mothley, and full of interest about people in the village. But Will could not forget that though she was bright when spoken to, and extraordinarily easy in manners for one so young, there was a quiet *recueillement* in that inner air which reveals character, *and* that she was strikingly beautiful.

When Lady Mannerton and Lady May left the dining-room, for a time Vincent was silent. He found himself next Mr. Blake. Sir Hugh and Mr. Mothley were conversing earnestly on local matters, and Will was startled from a reverie by his neighbour's abrupt question, uttered with a severity which implied a reproof and challenged a defence,—

"You have been much abroad, Mr. Vincent?"

"I am half an Italian," was the answer, "and have spent my early life in Italy."

"H'm, an unhappy country, given up, I believe, to gross superstition."

"Well, no," said Will, half smiling, "the Italians are a fine people; they are Roman Catholics certainly, but—especially among the poor mountaineers whom I knew—they seemed to be very religious."

"Religious! they believe in the Pope and the Virgin Mary—they do not know the blessing of a reformed Religion."

"Yes," said Will, "the Pope is the head

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of their Church, and they sometimes speak of Our Lady in a way, I suppose, we should not; but they seemed to me to have a very real sense of another world."

"'Our Lady!' Young man, are you a Protestant?"

At this moment Mr. Mothley turned round, smiling, "My dear Mr. Vincent," he said quietly, "you seem to be getting into controversial waters. Our friend here has strong opinions, and controversy is dangerous."

Vincent laughed. "I am very sorry," he said, "I spoke in good faith, I know little of Protestants," my father there (nodding across the table), "he taught me to be pleased at everything that is really Catholic, whether I find it in my own part of the Church or anywhere else."

The doctor laughed across the table. "Oh! Will, Will," he said, "you haven't yet learnt what a power words are in England. You must forgive him," turning to Mr. Blake, "if he has spoken in any way you would disapprove of, he has only been used to England as a schoolboy and an undergraduate."

"I think we will go to the drawing-room," cut in Sir Hugh, for Mr. Blake's brow was gathering blackness, and there seemed to be a coming storm.

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The atmosphere in the drawing-room was quite serene.

Lady Mannerton was standing by the fire, and Lady May and she were talking with earnestness.

In a moment they all fell into their places, the doctor, Mr. Mothley and Sir Hugh stood conversing round the fire, and Lady Mannerton engrossed the interest of Mr. Blake, who was all obsequious attention, and Vincent found himself beside Lady May at a table where she was turning over some fine prints in a portfolio.

"They are some prints which my father got long ago in Italy, Mr. Vincent. I wonder are they really like, you know Italy well? I have never been abroad except in France."

"Yes, Italy is my native land."

"But you are English too, aren't you?"

"I suppose half of me is English," he answered, laughing, "and I am glad of it."

"Why glad?"

"Well, because there are only two countries worth naming, to my thinking, England and Italy; and it is a great thing to belong to both."

"Do you really like England as well as Italy?"

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"Yes, in some ways more. It is so different, and yet so beautiful. Then, all the young men of my own age and rank whom I have met in Italy are very inferior to Englishmen. They are young, I suppose, with a new country, and they ape French manners, and they have not the quiet, easy sense and unpretentiousness of Englishmen."

"But don't you miss the sun and sky, and the churches and pictures? My father often talks of these."

"Oh! yes, Italy is a land of poetry and dreams. And our people up at Gubbio—the mountaineers—are a noble race. Grand fellows, so simple and faithful. I love the mountain people."

"Well, you have a sort of mountain people here?"

"Yes; quite different. But I do like these northern folk. As for Stafferton, I don't know why, but I love it."

"So do I," said Lady May; and then she laughed and added, "and we are alike in this, for *really* I have nothing to do with it, only now it is my home, but they call me" (and she laughed again such a merry laugh), "'The Child,'—a well-grown child!"

"The Child of Stafferton," said Will; "what does it mean?"

And then she told him all she knew of the story, and, as she told it, her large blue

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eyes dilated with a sort of amused, half incredulous wonder when she spoke of the ghostly traditions of the Court, and her face became so animated and self-forgetful that Vincent thought never, in all his finest pictures in Italy, had he seen anything so beautiful.

"And then," she added, as she finished her recital and half-laughed as she said it, "the sad thing is, I can never see the ghosts, for though my father calls me 'The Child,' there is no real child, and I am not a Durrell at all."

Will fairly laughed with infectious humour at her half-plaintive, half-joking manner.

"Would you like to be a Durrell?" he said; "is there some mysterious advantage in it?"

"Well, yes, I should. You see, the Rosebys were all rich and commonplace; we have no ghosts. I suppose the next best thing to being a Durrell is to be a kind of sham 'Child,' as I am. If only the ghosts would do me the favour! But there, they won't, I suppose, except to the real thing!"

"I wish I could help you!" laughed Will; "but I'm afraid it is out of my power."

"I don't know that, Mr. Vincent,"—and she gazed at him until the young man

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fairly blushed,—"do you know, it is the most extraordinary thing, you are the very image of that wicked, handsome, old Sir Hugh in the Hall? How is it? It is quite extraordinary."

"I don't know whether to be flattered or angry," answered Will, smiling. "Am I wicked, or am I handsome? Or may I flatter myself that I am a little of both?"

"You are absurd, Mr. Vincent," answered May, rising, and he fancied there was some displeasure in her tone.

"Excuse me, Lady May," he added, to turn the subject, "who is that clergyman talking to Sir Hugh? He seemed so wroth with me after dinner for speaking of Our Lady."

May looked at him for a moment with an expression of unfeigned amusement, and then burst into a merry laugh.

"What! you called the Blessed Virgin 'Our Lady' to him?"

"Well," said Will apologetically, "I always have called her so; there is nothing wrong, is there? I don't know much about it, but my uncle says she is so called in the Prayer-book, and we always did in Italy."

Lady May laughed again. "Oh! that is too good. Why, he's the kindest, most stupid man you ever met. He's a genuine

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Protestant. He has no more notion of anything beyond religious controversy, than if he had been born in the moon. You talk to my mother about him. Dear mother! Why, she has had him to herself half the night. I don't mind him, only I think he is stupid; but my mother can't bear him. He'll never speak to *you* again. It will be bad enough that you have been in Italy and seen the Pope, but to talk of 'Our Lady,' oh! Mr. Vincent," and then May laughed with hearty amusement.

"My dear May," called out Lady Mannerton, suppressing a yawn behind her fan, "what are you making such a noise about? I think it must be bedtime."

"Mother dear," said May, quite aloud, "I am only talking to Mr. Vincent about the Pope."

May looked towards Mr. Blake, and Mr. Blake cast a glance of withering horror at young Vincent.

"Good nights" were said, and the ladies were gone.

"Good night," she had said last to Vincent, "Mr. Blake will never speak to *you* again."

"Well, I hope *you* will, anyhow," he answered, "and I shall try not be so wicked as Sir Hugh; and I hope you will see the ghost."

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"Thank you, there is little chance of that," and then she was gone.

"She may be the 'sham child,' or not," thought Vincent, "but she is most wonderfully beautiful."

"He says he'll try not to be so wicked as Sir Hugh, mother," said Lady May, as she and her mother went together along the gallery, "but he needn't try not to be so handsome, need he?"

"No, dear," was Lady Mannerton's answer, "he is a wonderfully good-looking boy; a little shy, but with such pretty manners; and the likeness to that picture is extraordinary. May, what were you making such a noise about?"

"Oh! mother," laughed Lady May, "what *do* you think? he talked about 'Our Lady' to that Mr. Blake!"

Lady Mannerton laughed heartily in her turn. "Well, my dear, that was awkward. I suppose he isn't used to a real British Protestant. That Blake may be good, but he's a goose. I can't think why your father has him here. He has been boring me all the evening."

"Dear, dear mammy," said Lady May, as they parted for the night, "and you looked so sweet and placid all the time. Mother, darling, you are the dearest of dears; I can't think how you can be so sweet to people that bore you."

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"Well, my darling, you never bore me, anyhow," and the mother and daughter kissed tenderly and parted for the night.

It was clear bright moonlight as Doctor Pendrell and Vincent left the Court. The great edges of the upper scaurs cast jagged, uneven shadows. The wind sighed and moaned in the still leafless trees, and the wide waste of the moonlight slept upon park and stream, and village. Vincent was restless and excited. He could not tell why, but somehow life seemed to him the awakening from a dream. All before this had gone in a smooth and quiet, sometimes even in an almost melancholy way. His had been a happy home, but the lonely boy, with his strange Italian nature full of wild fancies and strong affections, and possessed of all the *chiaroscuro* of an artist's temperament, and then of a strong English nature also, had never found life much more than a half-satisfying dream. The strong, healthy regimen of an English school had done good work for him. It had saved him from being a *dilettante*, or in any bad sense a dreamer. He had hated Winchester at first, and at last had loved it, as men of truth of character who pass well through the fire of a Public School are sure to love it; yet in many ways the sturdiness, the unpityingness, the slavery to certain esta-

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blished codes of custom or feeling, which mark schoolboy life, as much as the good fellowship and easy, happy light-heartedness—had not been congenial to at least one half of his nature. Oxford in some ways was better. He was more his own master, could think his own thoughts, and associate with his own friends more freely, but something in him made him not only miss his bright, strange Italy, but also feel himself alone and exiled, and surrounded with a sense of mystery.

And now almost suddenly he seemed awakened to a keener interest in life. Lady May's face, Lady May's voice, were the opening of a door in a heaven to him. Her easy, pretty ways, her bright, happy humour, and underneath—in those large deep eyes—a depth of real earnestness, inexplicable, most moving—and above all an evident sense in her of interest in him—all, all was awakening Vincent to life as before he never had been awakened, as no man ever is awakened probably until he loves.

His mind was full of strange, unsorted thoughts, and half-sad, half-happy fancies as he and his uncle left the Court, and he proposed accordingly that they should take a turn along the southern terrace, to enjoy the moonlight ere they returned home.

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The doctor was sufficiently hardy to have no fear of his native north winds, and so, wrapping their Italian cloaks round them in Italian fashion, they turned back down one of the little alleys in the shrubberies surrounding the northern wing, passed the back of the house, and came out on the terrace underneath the tower. It was one of those glorious nights not uncommon in an English spring. The Park stretched away for miles and miles before them. To their right the line of jagged scaurs frowned above, and flung their shadows into the white moonlight, like giants of Death invading the realm of Life. A haze not so soft but finer than the haze of summer, hung over the leafless woods, and far away to the south-west, wrapped in a garment of almost mystic light, rose the long sharp lines of Pendrell ridge.

Vincent told the doctor of his unfortunate remark to Mr. Blake. The doctor laughed, and lectured a little on the need of care in the use of language, consideration for others' feelings, and allowance to be made for good men who live in a groove. Vincent scarcely heard him; his thoughts were busy with Lady May. Why was she always recurring to the likeness she had detected in him to the old wicked Durrell? Why did she seem so animated by it?

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She already took an interest in him, that was certain. What nonsense! She was only a child. And then off his thoughts wandered to the portrait, and flitted on to the history of the family in which he was learning to find so much to interest him.

How strange and sad it seemed! An old house to draw to its end! And somehow all its sorrows apparently connecting themselves with the act of one man long ago: and no "Child of Stafferton" now—except May. Well, she might not be a Durrell, but what house could wish for a lovelier representative! Of course by-and-by she would marry some English magnate—and Stafferton would go on, not in the Durrell line, but in a happy English way. He clenched his fist as he thought of it, as if prepared to treat the intruder in the old place, and the supposed aspirant to Lady May's hand, as a personal enemy. Ah! Will, Will, if you only knew the dangerous path you are treading! Better turn and flee from Stafferton than go on in the happy, cruel dream of a hopeless love!

They had reached the end of the terrace nearest the tower, and were turning round the northern angle of it to make for home, when Will caught his uncle's arm, and suddenly cried in a low voice, "Stop! Look!"

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The doctor glanced along the terrace, and as his nephew drew him back out of the light into an angle of shadow, he became aware that from the direction in which Vincent pointed there seemed to be approaching them the figure of a man. Not a word was spoken between them as they looked with some astonishment to see any one beside themselves moving on the terrace at so late an hour.

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CHAPTER V.

COMPARING NOTES.

THE doctor and Vincent had withdrawn into the shadow of the tower. The night was cold, and the doctor impatient of standing.

"What *are* you gazing at, Will?" he said, as the young man strained his eyes with rapt astonishment into the moonlight.

"Look, look!" was all the answer that he got.

"I see nothing," said the doctor; "there is a moving shadow certainly under the house. I thought at first it was a man, but it is only an effect of the wind in the trees."

"Trees," said Will, in a solemn whisper, "trees, there are no trees there."

Before Will's eyes there was a moving figure, the figure of a man. He seemed tall and gaunt, and was wrapped in a strange old-fashioned cloak, and he moved noiselessly along towards where they stood. He had come from the angle where an outer door, always carefully barred, opened into the great library, and he moved

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steadily but silently towards the tower. Just beyond the angle in which they were ensconced, there was an outer door, never opened, meant to admit, when first it had been constructed, from the tower to the terrace. Here the figure paused, and, turning in the moonlight, stretched a gaunt lean arm towards Will, and showed in the moonlight a pale miserable face, under a large, tall, peaked hat, gazing fiercely, sadly, almost angrily for a moment—then turned to the tower door and disappeared.

Will sprang forward, breaking the spell-bound silence with a cry.

"He is entering the house!" he said, and he rushed a step or two forward towards the tower door. The doctor followed, astonished and attracted by the sudden cry and movement of his nephew.

The tower door was secure. No sound of its opening had been heard, and when the young man pushed against it, it was stiff and sturdy to resist his weight.

"He is gone!" he said. "Father, what does it mean?"

"He? Who?" answered the amazed doctor. "Will, you are crazed."

"I am not crazed; I saw him; father, didn't *you* see?" and he turned a face of searching menace upon his uncle, pale as the moonlight which made it plain.

"I saw Sir Hugh," said Will, "old Sir

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Hugh, that man in the picture, an awful image of myself. Father, what does it mean? Who is it? *Am* I crazy? Did you really see nothing?"

The doctor was a man of a quiet, stalwart character, and of strong, unshaken nerves, but he was startled, and he was alarmed. He had seen something, *that* he could not deny, something like a flitting shadow, but he thought—as one does—it must have been imagination, and he was alarmed for his nephew. His evident sense of something seen, and then the words he uttered, startled the doctor; there *was* something strange in it all. He could not explain it, he would not give in to a mere fancy, but he felt an uneasy feeling connecting itself with knowledge he had, and which was always working in his mind. Had he been alone, he might have set about philosophically to ponder; but he was a medical man, and he was seriously alarmed for Will, who asked his questions of him with a fierce persistence, and looked deadly pale in the chill clear light of the March moon.

"You are excited, my boy," he said. "You are tired; there was something, I don't know what it may have been. Come away, it is time to be home."

Will argued the question no more, but as they parted that night, he turned to

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his uncle, and looking him steadily in the face, he said, "Father, I saw him, I saw old Sir Hugh. I don't know what it means, but it must mean something, and you know something about it; if you do, some day you will tell me."

"If I do, I will," said the doctor. "Good-night, my boy, do not allow excited fancy to overcome you."

"Good-night, pater," and they parted for the night.

When Lady Mannerton parted that night from Lady May at the head of the great staircase, the latter was as far from sad thoughts as well could be imagined, and yet somehow it was impossible for her to talk to her maid in the usual light and gossiping fashion which was common to her before she retired to rest, and she certainly had a sense of relief when she was left alone.

The fire was bright; the armchair was cosy; the table, as usual, was placed beside her; her feet, in the soft velvet slippers, were upon the fender, her hair hung over her shoulders, and there was a copy of the *Imitation* in her hand.

But she did not read a line.

The conversation of the evening came back upon her.

Will had interested her, she could hardly tell how or why; but in wondering

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how or why, the only thing that was distinct upon her mind was the grace of his manner, the depth and intensity which she had felt in his eyes, and that extraordinary likeness to the portrait of old Sir Hugh upon which she had insisted from the first moment that she had seen him.

"What does it matter if he is like the picture?" she laughingly said to herself, and raised the volume of the *Imitation* again, determined to read.

There are powers in us more potent than sudden or spurious determinations, and Lady May did not read.

She gazed into the fire, and the blazing coals seemed to form themselves into all sorts of grotesque combinations, but amidst all the combinations there came out, first distinctly, and then in varying and fading shadow, the old portrait to which she had been so long accustomed, softened down at first, into the gentle and earnest expression of the young face which had looked into her own, and the lips that had spoken so eagerly about the experiences of his Italian boyhood; and how or when she knew not (for who of us can draw the frontier line between the land of sleep and the land of waking?) she fell asleep.

But in the shadow-land the same face was still before her, only now it was both

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stern and pleading. Old Sir Hugh was standing before her, and beckoning her, almost compelling her to come. She rose from her chair and followed. He led her to the landing. The light seemed to glow upon the staircase, and she followed him, with a sense of astonishment, but with no sense of fear, down the great staircase.

The hall, she afterwards remembered, looked precisely as usual, and she even had a sense of the portrait of the grim Durrell ancestor looking young and handsome down upon them as they passed.

They passed across the hall, and entered the library, and Sir Hugh motioned her to a seat in the great armchair that stood by the library fire; and then he turned, and pointed, with his long right hand, and with a look of pleading persistence in his face, to one of the highest doors in a long line of upper enclosed shelves which ran round the top of the book-cases with which the room was encircled.

Lady May gazed for a moment, as if questioning what to do; just then a shivering cry of anguish rang through the room. Sir Hugh seemed to stand as if paralyzed, and before her eyes there appeared a pitiable spectacle of a little boy.

His face was pale, his lips half parted, and his hands raised in an attitude of

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pleading despair; he seemed to pause for an instant before the two, and then flitted past in the direction of the door which led from the library to the old corner tower. Again there was a piercing shriek, and Lady May woke with a start.

Who has not known the dreadful moment, when, conquered by a terrifying nightmare, we have tried to rid ourselves of the over-mastering dominance of the realms of night, and to recover with a supreme effort the balance of our consciousness, so as to realize our actual situation in the realms of day?

That agony of effort was felt by Lady May; and when she did recover her full self-consciousness, she was seated—there was no question about it—in the great armchair by the library fire! It had been a terrible dream, she must have walked in her sleep. How could she have been so foolish!

There was nothing further for it but to return to her room.

The embers were slowly dying in the great fireplace. The wild March winds were sighing round the old court. The moonbeams were struggling fitfully, under the pressure of passing clouds, through the great library windows. She paused for a moment, and felt that she was shivering with cold.

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In another moment she had groped the way to the library table, struck a match, lighted a candle, and prepared to return to her room; but she turned involuntarily and fixed her eyes, lest she should forget it, on the closed cupboard above the book-shelves, towards which Sir Hugh had pointed in her dream; she gazed with a shudder at the tower door in the corner, and then hurriedly but quietly left the room.

The house was perfectly still, she moved with a stealthy step as she ascended the great staircase, and especially as she passed by her mother's room; but she could not resist casting a furtive glance at the portrait in the hall.

There he was in his youth and beauty, so like and yet so unlike the dead man of her dreams; so like and yet so unlike—because of the cruel set of the lips—the young man whom she had seen and talked to the night before.

It was long before she fell asleep, for her dream haunted her, but she said a prayer, and sleep comes easily to the innocent, even when the nerves have been shaken, and at last she did fall asleep.

Vincent had promised to call at the Court to see Sir Hugh on a question of some Italian manuscripts at twelve o'clock on the following day. He had dawdled through the morning, doing nothing

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particular, and saying nothing to his uncle about his previous night's experience, and his uncle had said nothing to him.

He was punctually at the Court at twelve. Indeed, he had been in the churchyard half an hour before the time named, and had sat on the stile, wondering and thinking what the meaning could be of what certainly he had seen, and taking in, in the lazy, half-conscious way that we do at such times, the wild torn clouds which were drifting across the jagged scaurs careering before the mad March wind.

When he was shown into the hall Lady Mary was on the staircase, just as he had seen her the first time they had met. And yet he thought what a different Lady May! there was no touch of sunlight on her face, nor shaft of laughter in her eyes; when she stretched her hand to him she did so without even that shadow of a smile with which we usually welcome a chance acquaintance. He passed into the library, and transacted his business with Sir Hugh; it was interesting business to both of them, for Sir Hugh soon discovered, that notwithstanding all his study, his young friend knew more of the MSS. of Dante than he had learnt in years of research.

Vincent lunched at the Court, and when luncheon was over Sir Hugh proposed that

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he should walk with himself and his daughter up the gash in the moors by which a path led to some interesting caves.

It so happened that in starting Sir Hugh was detained by his bailiff, who had come to speak to him on some local matter, and Vincent and Lady May set out alone. They had walked some distance in silence when his companion proposed that they should sit down under the shelter of an overhanging crag, and wait for her father.

"You are grave this morning, Lady May," said Vincent. "I must have tired you with my talk last night. Have you dreamt of Italy and the Madonnas, or does your gravity come from having dreamt, perhaps, of Mr. Blake?"

"How strange that you should talk of a dream!" was the answer. "Did you know it? I had a strange and terrible dream;" and then she turned and looked at him with a startling directness, and added, "You strike me as being yourself unusually grave, Mr. Vincent."

There was no eluding her searching look, and he answered quite simply and honestly, "I am grave to-day, Lady May; I had no dream, but I had a waking vision."

"What was it you saw?" she asked; "or," and then she paused and looked steadily at him, "*who* was it you saw?"

"I saw old Sir Hugh," he answered.

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She did not seem the least startled, but only added, "And no one else?"

"No, no one else."

"I saw some one else, I saw the 'Child of Stafferton.' You remember last night, Mr. Vincent, how I wished that I were permitted to see those renowned apparitions. I could desire to withdraw that wish now, and yet," she added, as if speaking to herself, "after all it was only a dream. And do you know, Mr. Vincent, that up there," and she cast almost a frightened glance up the gash in the glen, "is the very spot where they say that poor child was killed. But, come, you must tell me what you saw."

Vincent told his story, and then she told hers, and then they sat silent for a moment.

Lady May was the first to speak.

"It is strange, Mr. Vincent," and she tried rather vainly to laugh as she said it, "that we should both have had our first ghostly experience on the same night."

"Yes, it is strange," he answered.

"Mr. Vincent," she said, after a moment, they say that such sights betoken no good to the Durrells. I am not a Durrell, but I suppose I am mixed up with their fortunes since they call me now, as you know, 'the Child of Stafferton.'"

"I don't believe that any ill can happen

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to the good and the innocent," Will answered seriously.

"There is such a thing, Mr. Vincent," May said gravely, "is there not, as the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children?"

"There is, I suppose," he answered; "but then, as you have said, you are not really 'the child;' anyhow"—he went on with great earnestness—"if ill should come to you, Lady May, I seem to have some mysterious share in the fortunes of the house, you will let me help you? Will you not?" and he laid his hand gently upon hers, "You will trust me?"

"Yes, I will trust you," and as she spoke she looked at him with a glance of quiet, dependent confidence, which went to the young man's heart.

And then she laughed, "Think of talking of ghosts on this windy, sunny March afternoon! Let us think of pleasanter things; and here is my father."

Will listened more or less to Sir Hugh's conversation as they walked for a couple of hours up to and across the moor, but his mind was running upon other topics, and he felt happier than he had done since the old days in Italy, and he felt that he would gladly see a thousand ghosts if only they gave him such another chance of comparing notes, in this fashion, with Lady May.

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CHAPTER VI.

DAYS OF SUNSHINE.

STAFFERTON had become an altogether different place to Vincent. He had established his position at the Court, both by reason of the assistance which he was able to give to Sir Hugh in his Italian studies, and further by that thorough understanding which had been so suddenly and so mysteriously established between himself and Lady May. There were few evenings in which he and his uncle, one or both, did not dine at the Court, and few mornings in which he did not spend several hours of interest in the library, followed by hours in the afternoon, to him still more interesting, in walking about the park or over the moors with Sir Hugh and his daughter. So the Easter vacation drifted away.

Vincent was again at Oxford for his closing term, but amidst his work—and he was a real worker—he found time for sketches which might interest Lady May, or the discovery and collation of various readings in MSS of value to her father.

April, May, and the early days of June were spent by the family at Heath Cross.

Lady May had not, as the phrase goes,

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"come out," and consequently London had few attractions either for Lady Mannerton or Sir Hugh.

In the early days of June they were again at Stafferton; and Vincent, who did not spend an unnecessary hour in Oxford, was there soon after them. The thread of the life, which now seemed quite an old life, was easily and naturally resumed. Night after night was spent at the Court by the doctor and his nephew; day after day Vincent found some excuse for passing much time with the baronet, and consequently (for in out-door exercise she was his constant companion) with Lady May.

There is no place like an English country house, when once the ice is broken, for maturing acquaintance, even friendship; and no one seemed to doubt that part of the necessary routine of the quiet homely life at Stafferton Court required the presence of Vincent.

Strangely enough there was no one better pleased at the arrangement than Dr. Pendrell. Certainly he saw less of his nephew than he had ever seen before, but although he missed his companionship—for the boy was the very light of his eyes—he seemed to be entirely satisfied. So things drifted on to the 23rd of June, the Eve of St. John, and that day being memorable in the histories of those

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with whom we are concerned, we are obliged to pause upon it in detail.

It was one of those glorious days when the climate of even North England defies comparison. The sun was warm, the sky was blue, and the gentle breezes from the moors prevented the heat, which was considerable, from being oppressive.

The birds—which are wiser in their generation, north of the Trent, than their relations to the south of that mystic river—were singing as diligently as if it were early spring, the roses in the gardens were already asserting the supremacy of summer, the "beck" was dancing and dimpling in the sunbeams; everywhere there was

> "The bean flower's boon,
> And the blackbird's tune,
> And *June, all June.*"

The moors seemed drowsily resting in a soft anticipation of their coming carpet of purple; no gun as yet disturbed the wild free life of the roving grouse; June everywhere, and nowhere more than in young Vincent's heart; it was June "with him from head to heel."

He had spent two hours with Sir Hugh in the forenoon, in examining notes on the "Purgatorio," but he had heard, in fitful gushes of sound, the music of Lady May's violin, when the door was occasionally opened between the library and Lady

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Mannerton's sitting-room. He lunched with his uncle at the Grange, but an arrangement had been made that he should be Lady May's escort in an afternoon ride up the dales. At half-past two he was at the Court, and joined Lady May in the hall, and found her ready dressed in her riding-habit.

"Do you know whom I'm waiting for?" she asked, smiling, and then in answer to his look of interrogation, "I am waiting for 'Lady Dorothy.'"

"And who may Lady Dorothy be?" was Vincent's question.

"My new mare, she is a gift from Lord Ravensthorpe, or rather from his dear good aunt, and called of course after the famous ancestress. I have only ridden her once, last night with my father, but she is a beautiful creature, and I am going to prove to her"—and then she looked strangely grave at Vincent—"that if there are no ghosts here belonging to her family, at least the dale country is as beautiful as Ravensthorpe."

They were soon upon horseback, and "Lady Dorothy," whose points were duly discussed, proved herself worthy of the character she had received. But Vincent was much more interested in the rider than in the horse that carried her.

"Have you ever taken expeditions on horseback, Mr. Vincent, when you lived

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in Italy?" was May's first general question.

"Yes, but not on horses like these; ours were little mountain ponies, but some of the pleasantest times I have ever spent were when my father took me on two such journeys. One he called a *viaggio Raffaelesco* and the other a *viaggio Dantesco*."

"You always call Dr. Pendrell 'father,' Mr. Vincent; he is really your uncle, isn't he?"

"Yes, but he likes it, and so do I; he has been more than a father to me."

"Well, tell me about the journeys, Mr. Vincent," she went on, as they drew bridle, after a sharp trot, up a heavy hill, under some beetling scaurs.

"Well, that isn't an easy task; but I'll give you an idea. We set off once from Pesaro to visit Colbordolo,—that was the seat of Raphael's ancestors; and if you imagine that scaur up there crowned with houses and churches, only much more wild, and canopied over with a sky of deeper blue, you can imagine the place. Raphael's great-grandfather lived there, and when Malatesta plundered it the Santi fled up the valley of the Foglia for refuge at Urbino. There wasn't much to see in the place, so we made a bad luncheon on olives, and cheese, and grapes and sour wine, and fled after them.

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"I wish I could give you an idea of Urbino,"—and then he spoke with such strong enthusiasm, that Lady May soon forgot to interfere with Lady Dorothy, and both the horses did much what they pleased.

"First of all, the inhabitants are simply perfect in their beauty, and then the town, itself is the most complete specimen of what my Italy in the Middle Age could do. There is the remnant of the great palace that Montefeltro built when he trained his soldiers, and protected his people, and guarded the church, and surrounded himself with the greatest artists of the day, from Justus of Ghent to the old Santi, Raphael's father. I wish you could see the staircase of that palace, and the great halls and the remnants of the frescoes. The wonderful furniture since then has been scattered among the palaces of Florence and Rome; but Raphael trod those stairs when he was a boy, and gathered his first inspirations from the peaks and pines of Urbino, and from the lovely women and the fair children and the artists' works on the palace walls."

"And then there is the cathedral, with the pictures of Francesca and Timoteo delle Vite, and the solemn services setting off the pictures, and then the Accademia full of works still beautiful enough to give you

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studies for half a lifetime; and then the steep streets where the stones are set in such odd ways, and the view across the valleys, where the sun-dawns and the sun-sets make you dream of an eternity of glory; and above all the house of Raphael! That dear Raphael, who took everything he saw from art and nature, who missed nothing, learned from Perugino, learned from Mantegna, learned from Signorelli, learned from men and nature, and then wove something quite different, out of his own soul, more beautiful than them all! Raphael! why, he only lived for seven-and-thirty years, and think of his Madonnas, and think of his clear, pathetic landscapes, and think of the *Disputa*, and think of the Loggia at the Vatican! His life was all work, drawing things clean out of another world, and leaving them behind him in this.

"That was a life!" And he rose in his stirrups as he said it, and tossed his hair back in his enthusiasm. "That was a life worth living; all work, and never any mere *dilettanteism!* And yet so full of sunshine and sweetness, that every one who knew him loved him, and he left a world behind him to meditate and admire!

"But, Lady May, I am going wild; you know I am half an artist and half an Italian. I wish you knew my Umbrian home, and then you would understand it.

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I am afraid I bore you, and 'Lady Dorothy' and this creature are forgetting their duties. Let us trot."

"No. I like it, Mr. Vincent. How long did you stay at Urbino?"

"Well, we stayed a week, you can't think how pleasant it was! You don't know my father, not well at least; but if you did, you would know there was no such companion in the world."

Lady May had her own thoughts on that subject, but she only said, "I can quite believe you, Mr. Vincent. Where did you go then?"

"Well, that was really the end of it, as far as Raphael was concerned; we went down the valley of the Metaurus and though the Furlo pass. You should see those precipices, hemming in the river, and with such a sky above them; that was our way towards Gubbio, where was our home. It is the finest thing in all the Apennines, and that is saying a great deal. I took sketch after sketch on our journey. I will show them to you some day, if you care to see."

"Of course I do," said May, and then after a pause, "Mr. Vincent, I can't think how you can live in England."

"Can't you?" he said, laughing; "you forget there are two sides to me, I am half an Englishman. I did love Italy more than anywhere; but now," he said, and he

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lowered his voice, "I love no place so much as Stafferton."

Lady May looked gravely straight between her horse's ears, and "Lady Dorothy" was suddenly compelled to sharpen her paces.

"Mr. Vincent," at last she said, "did you talk like this to the *men*—don't you call them *men*—at Winchester?"

Vincent burst into a peal of laughter.

"No, *that* I didn't; I should soon have been taught what to do with my rhapsodies. That is the use of an English public school. Lady May, you have touched a point I often think of. The English are so strong because they are so self-repressed. Boys are great tyrants, and the Italian side of me suffered, but they taught me to *condense* my feelings, and so, you see, they have not been wasted, and I can keep them, like Englishmen, for proper times and, Lady May," and he looked across at his companion with a merry smile, "for people worthy of them."

Lady May laughed heartily and joyously.

"Thank you," she said, "only I suppose your Winchester men taught you not to pay foolish compliments. But be serious, Mr. Vincent; I want to ask you what you may think a foolish question; I have often thought of this: you said just now,

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Raphael's was a life worth living; what, then, is, do you think," and she reined her mare up suddenly and looked straight at Vincent, "what then *is*, do you think, the use of life?"

"Now you have posed me," said Vincent. "I have never thought much about it, but I suppose," he said in a half-dreamy way, "to learn to love."

He had hardly uttered the words, when he wished he had not uttered them; he had a secret feeling that the Italian was conquering the Englishman; but Lady May was quite grave, and in another moment he felt with relief that she was a person worthy of being spoken to with real feeling.

"I don't know," she said, quite simply, "but dear old Mr. Mothley has often said, in his sermons, that the real use is, sincerely to follow Christ, and like Him, and by His help, to *serve*, to be unselfish, and to help people. I suppose that is what you mean; and that is what Raphael did."

Vincent was not quite sure whether that was what he meant, but one thing he felt with a sudden and terrible force, that life, for him, was "not worth living" away from Lady May. He was glad, however, that the Englishman now had sufficiently conquered the Italian to warn him to keep such a sentiment to himself.

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"We have gone too far, Mr. Vincent," said May suddenly, "we are miles beyond Morton. My Dorothy, you must mend your paces," and she leant forward and stroked the mare's neck affectionately as they turned towards home.

The evening was stealing on with the pleasant peace of an evening in June. There was little conversation on the homeward ride, merely talk of fresh points of view, especially when the road turned from the wild dale country, and they caught the first glimpses of the open valley and the trees and the tower of Stafferton.

When they reined up their horses in the stable-yard, to which they went directly, the clock, in what Vincent called "the Campanile," tolled only a quarter of an hour from dinner-time.

"I must be quick," said Lady May, "the only thing that really raises father's wrath, besides mispronunciation of your beloved Italian, is being late for dinner."

"Well, then, I will not dine at the Court to-night," said Vincent, as he sprang from his saddle, "but I shall call to-morrow morning," and as he gave her his hand to alight from "Lady Dorothy," at whose head stood a groom, "Thank you very much," he said, "I have had a better ride than my *Viaggio Raffaelesco*, and you will teach me another time something more about your

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theory of the unselfish view of life, and meantime let me try my hand by helping you."

Lady May laughed. "I said you might the other day," she answered, "if I were in any danger. Good-night, Mr. Vincent, there doesn't seem much danger now; except the danger of being late for dinner. Good-night," and she hurried into the house.

As Vincent said his "good-night," and turned to walk slowly away, he had a half-painful, half-pleasurable thought that *he* was plunged in danger, and in the quiet June evening he said to himself freely as he walked slowly towards the Grange, that such danger was better than safety. There was no one like her in the world, he said to himself. "To be unselfish and to help other people," her words rang in his ears. "I will try for her sake to be unselfish, and life will be worth living if I have a chance to help her."

Strange beings that we are, our deeper utterances in moments like these involve more than we think for. How his heart would have ached, and even *his* courage quailed, had he caught a glimpse, not of the chances, but of the certainties that lay before him of doing what he longed to do.

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CHAPTER VII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

When Vincent left the Court that evening he loitered slowly towards the Grange. Just beyond the line of buildings which ran back from the northern end of the Court he met two workmen. They were carpenters or bricklayers, he knew not which, who were engaged in repairs at the angle where the newer buildings met the old façade, and where there had been some fissure in the roof or some sinking in the foundations. They carried three long planks between them, and he noticed that they laid them up against the back wall of the main building. He noticed it in a half-conscious manner, in the way we do notice seeming trifles when our minds are intent on serious things. This made an impression on Vincent afterwards, as small things—if our eyes are open—give us large lessons, for upon the fact of his noticing such a trifle hung much of the happiness and sorrow of his after-life.

It was a sweet June evening. The soft

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air of summer—real English summer—swept down the gorges in the fells. The voices of little children were heard in merry laughter, or shouting at their games in the village street. Far away, as the evening closed, the distant barking of a stray and wakeful dog echoed through the happy summer stillness of the peaceful night. Farther still the scent of the early meadows, where the first swathe was cut, came borne on the evening wind, and in the Park the trees sighed with that sad sweet cadence before the evening breeze, which in pathos and tenderness is only heard in summer. Nature has many voices, but there is none more moving, more penetrating than the voice of the still June evening, when Nature joins with human joy and human sorrow at least for a moment to whisper peace.

Vincent did not turn immediately towards the path which, through the churchyard, led home. Turning the angle of the Court, he felt the breath of evening flowers, and wandered, without thinking where, into the rose garden. There were quaint yew walks, and here and there weather-beaten figures,—the mementoes of the eccentric taste of a departed Durrell,—plain, shivering and discoloured Venuses and Apollos there under the

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shadow of the Yorkshire fells. But nothing to-night could look out of place to Vincent. To the high-minded and the pure-hearted the first dream of real love is a heaven of joy. The glamour of his native Italy seemed upon him; the Yorkshire crags took the poetry of Umbria, the pines and beeches might have been in the garden of the Apennines, so full were they of poetry and mystic repose. And then to his Italy he added something more, and something not to be surpassed or even matched in Italy. There was the calmness, the strength, the repose of an English summer. He did not think of these things. His whole being was awake with a new power. He was lifted above himself. The earth was beautiful. The heavens were aglow with a light of mystic charm. To him, it seemed that he was happy. He felt—

> "To me
> A livelier emerald sparkles in the grass,
> A purer sapphire melts into the sea."

New life seemed to come. No more of the lazy dream of boyhood, no more of the half-waking consciousness of the easy-going, somewhat selfish life of early manhood. Life seemed life. Self-sacrifice was no longer a distant possibility, but an ardent desire. "Blessed are the pure in

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heart, they see God." He loved; loved with a manly tenderness, and with the strength, the unexampled strength, of those—few it may be, but real in the strength of their manhood—who are pure in heart, and forget themselves in loving.

Love is the best bond between man and man, between man and woman, between man and God. The sacred name is often trailed through the dust, and soiled with the stain of self-seeking passion. Vincent was an artist, an Italian, an Englishman, a high-minded man; and love had come to him with clear eyes and unsullied wings, and life was changed. He had a great awakening. To find another embodying in ideal the goodness and beauty for which the soul of the true artist longs,—this had been his blessing; and alone in the fair June evening, in the quiet garden where the opening roses were falling into summer sleep, and the evening breezes dying down with sympathetic murmurs among the trees, he knew that dream of a pure, young, strong life which is surely the foretaste of a better country, when

"Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all its chords with might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd in music out of sight."

He wanted nothing but to sacrifice Self. He *loved* May Roseby, that was all.

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As Vincent wandered, half-dreaming, out of the rose garden—how long he had been there he did not know—he suddenly found himself on the terrace by the southern tower. Suddenly also he remembered the evening when he had walked there with his uncle and all that had followed. And as he gazed, a strange and bending figure seemed again to emerge in the gloaming, from the library, and to pass with measured steps and disappear by the door in the tower. For a moment he stood spell-bound. Was it a dream? Was he mad? His uncle had not seen it before, though his uncle had seen something. Then he remembered Lady May's words as to the apparition, "They say that their appearance bodes no good to the Durrells." "Folly," he said to himself, and turned on his heel. But we call our nightmare "folly," yet feel its haunting force. There are powers in life which hold and try us, although what we call our "common sense" condemns. Will Vincent shuddered. "Anyhow, she is not a Durrell," he said to himself. "Anyhow, there is a God in heaven Who protects the good and innocent. Anyhow she said I might help her in danger," and he clenched his fingers more tightly, "and by Heaven's aid I *will* help!" and then he began to walk quickly home.

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He thought the night chilly. The sunlight of his heart had been clouded with shadow. A chill wind had blown across the flowers of his dream and closed them; but the central heat was not gone. He loved May Roseby. Whatever the future might have to say, *that* was worth living for, and he was happy.

As Vincent passed across the bridge over the beck, he paused dreamily to gaze into the stream. Again the dying sounds of the summer night came over him, sweet, peaceful, human. Why should he be saddened by that shadowy presence on the terrace? He looked up to the old church-tower and beyond it to the quiet opening in the hills where the sky in background was gathering stars, and the peace of the evening entered into his soul. He would not be ridden by a nightmare; it was only his darker nature taking semi-substantial form,—and the bright boyhood in him, and the pure, manly heart asserted its supremacy. He loved the fairest, simplest, noblest creature in all creation, so it seemed, and the shadow passed, and yes, he was happy.

Dr. Pendrell, when he heard his nephew's step, was not astonished at the lateness of his return: he was rather surprised at his return so early. Vincent, however, had wakened up to the fact that he was late,

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as we do waken when we know the context; but his uncle did not know it, he had taken for granted that he would dine at the Court, and on that matter his nephew kept his own counsel. Dreams may be pleasant things, but none the less, however pleasant, will not for a strong lad of twenty supply the place of dinner, and Vincent, by the intervention of Lucia Nonna, managed a makeshift supper. He had come in humming snatches of Tuscan *Canti popolari*, many of which he knew by heart; they came to his Italian memory naturally then, for no love-songs in the world are so pure, so beautiful, so respectful, and on he went humming,—

> "Dice che tu ti affacci alla finestra:
> Ma non ti dice che tu vada fuori,
> Perchè, la notte, è cosa deshonesta."

As he opened the door and presently entered the old-fashioned drawing-room, his uncle was sitting by the window. It was open, and the old man had a lamp by him and a book in his hand.

"You are early, my boy," he said; "have you had a long ride? They are tired, I suppose, at the Court, to-night?"

"Yes, father," was all he answered, half mechanically, and then sat down at the pianoforte. He was carrying on the strain of his own thoughts, and, Italian-like, struck a few stray chords and sang:—

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"I come by night, I come, my heart aflame :
I come in this fair hour of thy sweet sleep :
And should I wake thee up it were a shame,
I cannot sleep, and lo ! I break thy sleep,
To wake thee were a shame from thy deep rest ;
Love never sleeps, nor they whom love hath blest."

Dr. Pendrell listened. "You are in an Italian mood to-night, Will, and I in a German. I have been out to visit old sick Margery down the village. A good soul, but tiresome. How different these people are from our mountaineers! and yet like them in their strength, but not in their childlike feeling, not quite. I have been refreshing myself with Goethe. What a sunny optimist the man is, with all his weird imaginations ! Optimism is bad, and so is pessimism. Both are untrue to life." And then the doctor remarked, as was his manner, "Nothing but Christianity strikes the mean. There is plenty of sunlight in life, and plenty of shadow."

"Plenty of sunlight, pater," said Will, "at least in this June weather. You should have seen those moors to-day." And then he sighed, thinking of the vision of the terrace, and his fingers wandering over the keys, "I suppose there is plenty of shadow."

"Sing, Will, sing," said the doctor; "I like to hear you on the summer evenings, it carries me back to Italy; but you want

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Lady May's violin obligato to set your voice off."

Will wished he had the violin, and more the violiniste, near him, but his rich voice needed no setting off, and he humoured his uncle's mood and sang :—

"O give me back the days of long ago,
When life was one long glad and laughing dream,
When things that are were less than things that seem.
No thought of sorrow then, no thought of woe,
O give me, give me back the days of long ago.

"O give me back the days of long ago,
When first fresh breezes breathed from far away,
When morning's splendour linger'd through the day.
No thought of sorrow then, no thought of woe,
O give me, give me back the days of long ago.

"O give me back the days of long ago,
When life with flashing power was all agleam,
And love took up and changed it to a dream.
No whisper then of heart-break or of pain,
O give me, give me back my youth again."

"Well, Will, you *can* sing!" said his uncle. "Where did you get those verses?' and the old man wiped his eyes.

"The thought came from your friend Goethe, uncle, in the Prelude, I think; and for the rest, it is—well, 'a little thing of my own.'"

"My boy," said his uncle, laughing, "you would make your fortune as an

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Improvisatore. In spite of all my efforts, you are three-fourths Italian still."

Will rose from the pianoforte and sat down opposite his uncle by the window.

"Father," he said, "was there really ever such a fellow as Faust?"

"Yes," answered Dr. Pendrell, "certainly, I think; there was magic and astrology; and all that sort of thing had a strange hold on the sixteenth-century mind. It came, I suppose, from the Platonists in the second and third centuries, and then it was revived at the *Renaissance*. Men were then at war with Scholasticism—not always wisely, perhaps—and your Dante reopened the springs of poetry. Then came Mirandola and Reuchlin. Aristotle had ruled with undisputed sway, and the new Platonists broke his rule. The minds of men were aroused, and their imaginations filled with shadowy dreams. They were men of full knowledge and better critical power. Tradition and more substantial testimony tell us that Faust flourished then. He may have been a conceited, learned visionary. He seems to have been a wandering magician. I believe, on the testimony of learned Germans, that he really lived, and was *not* Faust the printer. However, the real interest in him is the way Goethe used him. He is, after all, a peg to hang a moral on. As long as there

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is pride of intellect, and wild hunger for knowledge, and an angry impatience of the frontier which limits all we here can know, as long as men want to know as God knows, as long as there is unrestrained ambition to break down all boundaries of expanding and restraining Revelation, as long as men hate the authority of One above them, and desire to know and do as He alone can know and do,—so long Goethe's poem will command the attention of thinking men. Why, men now," said the doctor, leaning forward and speaking with energy, "want to search out all things, and then to dogmatize about the world we live in, while they part company with Him who made it. They bid good-bye to reverence and love, and without them a healthy moral life and real knowledge can never be. And then comes the final reaction of the victory of our lower nature. Dismiss law and rule, and reverence and love, and man, defying God, falls below the brute. Yes, my boy," added the doctor, "Goethe warns us, your Dante teaches. But I am wandering," he added wearily, "into a wide subject; let us to bed."

"Good-night, pater," said Will, "I like Dante best."

"And I like your voice and your song, Will," said the doctor, "only it is too sad for you yet, my boy: the time will come!

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the time will come!" and the old man sighed as he lighted his candle and again said, "Good-night."

Will threw his window open and listened out into the night. The beck was murmuring near his window, the wind was stealing gently from the moor, and whistling in the near pines. A stray dog was barking, a stray land-rail croaking. The stars were clear, the air was balmy, it was a perfect English summer night.

Will slept and dreamed. Phantom shapes of Faust and Dante and the *Cantatori* of the Umbrian hills came rambling through his brain, and the fair face of May was near him in gladness, and then it was darkened by a flitting shadow. At last he woke with a start. There was a voice calling loudly in his ears, and some one was shaking him with no merciful hand. It was old Lucia Nonna.

"Svegliati, figluolo mio," she cried, "brucia il palazzo! Fuoco, fuoco!" And the old woman shook him again.

Will started up. "What? the Court on fire!"

"Si, si, figlio mio, brucia il palazzo. They burn," she said; "the doctor goes."

Will was out of bed in a moment, his dressing was hasty enough, and in another minute he was down the stairs, through

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the wood, and had joined his uncle, already by the bridge.

"The Court is on fire, my boy," said his uncle; "look!"

Above the trees beyond the churchyard there rose against the clear quiet sky of morning a thick mass of smoke, shot through here and there by a jet of flame. It was too true. The Court was on fire.

When Will Vincent and his uncle reached the front entrance troops of people had already gathered. As yet no one knew exactly the bearing of things: no one knew what to do. They passed with many of the villagers through the hall. At the foot of the great staircase they met Sir Hugh, who with several servants was trying to arrange a rather venerable hose.

"I have sent to Settlethorpe for engines," said Sir Hugh, "of course our gear is all out of order; it will be half an hour before they can be here."

Just then Lady Mannerton appeared at the head of the staircase wrapped in her dressing-gown.

"Hugh, Hugh!" she cried, "where is May?"

"Isn't she with you?" answered Sir Hugh, looking up from his abortive endeavour.

"No, I have never seen her."

"Where is Lady May?" shouted Sir

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Hugh to the crowd of frightened servants now gathering in from every corner of the house. "Has any one called Lady May?"

No one answered.

"Good heavens!" said Sir Hugh, now fairly scared, and pausing in the preparations, "she surely is not in her room!"

Will Vincent now stepped forward very quiet and very pale.

"Where are Lady May's rooms, Sir Hugh?"

"There," said Sir Hugh, pointing across the staircase and through the great hall window. "There!" and as he said it there was a gasp of horror from all around.

Stafferton Court—as we have said—had a long irregular frontage, flanked at either end by protruding wings. The wing to the north ran back for a considerable distance with large, high, modern windows—out of character with the older part of the building, but beautiful by reason of creepers, and roses; and below, from the back of the building, ran a long "lean-to" conservatory filled with choice flowers. At the head of the great staircase a passage led into this "back return," and at the end of the passage was a door. Just by the door was a back staircase leading down to rooms which opened out into the conservatory. The upper part of the back wing was appropriated to Lady May.

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The lower story was at the moment unused.

Carpenters had been at work in it, and —afterwards, it was supposed from their carelessness—the fire had first smouldered there, and then broken out, and at the moment the part of the Court which was burning was the angle where the back wing joined the main body of the house.

Lady May's sitting-room, and beyond it her bedroom, were literally cut off by the fire.

"Are there ladders?" said Vincent. Is there a fire-escape?" as he looked from the staircase in the direction towards which Sir Hugh had pointed.

"None, near," was all Sir Hugh answered in a sort of dazed desperation.

"Has any one a rope?" was Vincent's next question as he sprang up the staircase.

"Plenty," answered a stalwart footman, who in shirt and trowsers, with his braces hanging down his back, had appeared that moment on the scene.

"Listen," said Vincent, turning round and speaking calmly and distinctly. "Below this window, on the grass, are two long planks. Bring them. Tie your rope tightly to one end, shove the ends with the ropes tied to them out of this window, and when I call, throw them to me and be quick."

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He spoke to the footman who had volunteered the rope.

In another moment Vincent was up the staircase; blinding smoke half smothered him as he went along the passage. Then there was a door. It gave. Inside was nothing but smoke and jets of fire. He saw for a moment a yawning gap where the floor had gone between where he stood and the room beyond, and he leapt. He fell headlong against another door, but there was, if not foot-hold, hand-hold at the other side, and in a moment he was in a room.

"Lady May," he said, "Lady May, are you there?"

A voice answered from within—but he could see nothing for the volumes of smoke—"Yes."

"Here, quick." In another moment he had thrown up the further of two high windows, and was standing on the window-sill. Fortunately the window was modern and lofty, and the sill was broad.

Lady May was beside him in a moment. Her hair was down, her dressing-gown was wrapped round her, her face was set and very pale. But Vincent had no time to notice these things.

"Stand by me," he said, "the smoke inside is suffocating," and he put his arm round her; "all will yet be well."

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"Are we to leap?" she said quietly, "we shall be burnt in that conservatory."

"No, dear," he said gently. "I will hold you, stand steady for a minute."

"Now, then," he shouted, "are you ready?"

There was a dreadful pause. It seemed like an hour to the two on the window-sill, in fact it was only a matter of moments, many hands had been at the service of the stalwart footman, and he had worked well.

The conservatory below and beyond them was in flames. Immediately beneath them the fire had scarcely reached, and the friendly and fitful breeze of the morning whirled the smoke and flame down the opened passages at the angle, so that they could plainly see the great staircase window.

The planks were there.

"Throw!" shouted Vincent.

He tried to catch the rope, but his left hand only was free, and the smoke came suddenly blinding from within and without, and the rope fell.

"Lady May," he said, "hold steady one minute by the window. Catch the casement behind; I must take this arm away."

She did so.

"Be careful, stand steady," he said anxiously, and she nodded assent.

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"Now again!" shouted Vincent, his right hand free.

The friendly wind came to their assistance, he saw the staircase-window.

The rope was thrown. This time he caught it, but for one moment there was a terrible balance as though he would fall.

He did not fall.

"Now stand steady, Lady May."

Then he went back into the room.

Slowly and carefully he drew the plank towards him till it rested firmly on the window sill. It was only the work of a moment to try the rope and then make it fast to a heavy piece of furniture, pushed close to the window and within the room.

"Now, Lady May," he said cheerily, "you said you would trust me in danger."

"I will," she answered.

"Put your arms tightly round my neck, and keep quite still," and he stooped that she might do as he directed.

It was a dreadful moment. Volumes of smoke came pouring up behind them from the burning floor. The flames were spreading in the conservatory down below. The plank was narrow, and it sloped slightly downwards towards the staircase-window. There was not a minute to be lost.

If the plank could not bear their weight! What then? Vincent had made up his mind, as he did promptly in most things.

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He would try to leap beyond the conservatory. They might be killed by the fall, at least they should not be burned.

For a moment he held the window-sill with his left hand to steady himself; with his right arm he raised Lady May.

"Cling tightly round my neck," he said; "don't be afraid, don't move!"

"All right," she answered quietly.

One foot on the window-sill, one on the plank, he firmly grasped Lady May in his arms; fortunately the plank was strong; fortunately, too, she was no great weight, and so they began their perilous path.

The wind blew the smoke and flame, now to one side, now to the other. He could not see. He could scarcely breathe; he could only feel his footing. Not for nothing, however, had he clambered up the boldest ledges of the Apennines. Slowly and firmly he set one foot before another. May was in his arms. Her life depended on his steadiness. He forgot the danger, forgot himself. He was all alert and calm and careful; he had lost himself in the thought of her.

It was done. Carefully and cautiously he went with his light burden through the opened window which lighted the great staircase and the hall. Slowly and quietly he stepped on to the inner ledge, while a ringing cheer—for all had forgotten the

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increasing fire in the awful moment of suspense—broke from the servants and villagers congregated on the stairs. Will stepped on to the staircase, and carried his precious burden down. Sir Hugh stood almost paralyzed with terror by the window. Lady Mannerton lay half fainting on the stairs. He heeded no one. Lady May's arms were round his neck, her head was on his shoulder. He was thankful and happy. He carried her straight down into her mother's sitting-room, and laid her gently on a sofa. "My darling," he said, "you are safe; and you behaved like yourself." He pressed his lips for one moment to her forehead, and was gone.

"See to Lady May," he said, as grimy and smoke-blinded, he met a maid-servant at the door.

The engines had just arrived from Settlethorpe, and the fire, which hitherto had burned almost unchecked, was now attacked in earnest. Several hard hours' work were done that bright June morning. Fortunately the fire had made chiefly for the back wing. The conservatory was a mass of smouldering ashes. Lady May's rooms were literally gutted. The interior of the front northern wing was desperately injured, but the main body of the Court was saved, and the frontage looked out on

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the summer beauty of its flower-beds, as if it had not almost witnessed that night a ghastly tragedy.

"Eh! my word! he's well plucked, that young Vincent," said a fat Yorkshireman, "he's well plucked, and no mistake, whether he's a furriner or not."

"I always said so," said the old gate-keeping woman, "I always said he was a good 'un," though in fact no one could remember that she had made that precise remark before.

"My boy," said his uncle, wiping the tears from his eyes, "I said you were three-fourths an Italian, you are every inch an Englishman."

"And a pack of ninnies *you* are," said the stalwart footman, "never to help the young gentleman. He's a good 'un, *he* is."

But the footman's remarks were partly self-congratulatory, and his laudation of Will was not diminished by a stray sovereign in Will's trowsers pockets which had found its way into the footman's hand.

Vincent had scarcely a rag to his back when again he reached the Grange. He hardly heard Lucia's flood of Italian praise intermingled with tears. He slept the sleep of weariness and peace far into that summer day. May had trusted him. May was safe. May had behaved as only May could, and he was happy.

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CHAPTER VIII.

FACTS ARE STUBBORN THINGS.

It will be no cause of astonishment to any one to learn that the incident of the morning of the 24th of June was not likely to diminish Vincent's hold upon the family at the Court. To himself it seemed little short of a great chasm between an old life and a new. It was not merely that Lady May owed her safety to his steadiness and courage, but that she had shown herself to be in firmness and trustfulness almost more than he had imagined. In trustfulness, —for the one thing that came out most distinctly before him from the memory of that dreadful morning was that she had trusted him absolutely.

No man can possibly go through a crisis in which his love and resolution are tested so severely as Vincent's had been without being an older and in some sense a changed man. He felt that, come what would, a tie had been created between Lady May and himself which nothing could break; but if I have given anything like a true estimate of his character, it will be felt that he was far too high-minded

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and generous to presume unduly upon such a tie. As for Lady May, her whole nervous system had received so severe a shock from her imminent danger and her extraordinary deliverance, that for many days after she was physically prostrate.

After any great catastrophe there is the usual reaction entailed by the conditions of that common life which must necessarily resume its course. Everybody had talked much at Stafferton of young Vincent's prowess, but nobody had dared to talk of it to him. Sir Hugh had thanked him with grave dignity, and Lady Mannerton with a mother's natural tears; his uncle had implied by stray remarks that it was just what he should have expected from him; old Lucia alone had ventured, with outspoken distinctness, to state, in Italian fashion, again and again, that there wasn't an Englishman among them fit to lace his boots.

The stalwart footman who had supplied the rope was loud in his praise, not diminished by the sovereign with which Vincent had rewarded his services, and not without a covert implication that Mr. Vincent could hardly have acted so bravely had he not been zealously seconded by himself.

But Will heard little, and cared less; he felt himself an older and graver man, having looked death so closely in the

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face; he was full of joy that May had been saved, and that he had saved her, and that she had trusted him. Every one concerned was more or less interested in the rebuilding of that part of the Court which had been destroyed; and after a few days May was again at her usual occupations, and Vincent was morning by morning closeted with Sir Hugh in the library, not so much now advising him on MSS. of Dante as discussing with him the plans for the restoration of the Court. So things gradually settled down, and for weeks and months ordinary life at Stafferton went quietly on.

It was in the afternoon of a clear day in the following September when Vincent and May had gone for what had now become their usual ride, that Lady Mannerton entered her husband's study.

"Hugh," she said, as she closed the door behind her which led from her own sitting-room, and took up a position on the hearth-rug, looking steadily at the back of Sir Hugh's head as he sat writing his letters at the table, "Hugh, I want to speak to you."

Lady Mannerton never called her husband by his Christian name, unless when she desired to speak on very serious business.

"My dear?" questioned Sir Hugh, turning his chair half round and dropping his pen.

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"Hugh, I am not sure that we are either of us quite wise or quite kind towards Mr. Vincent and May."

"My dear, what can you mean?"

"What I mean is this," said Lady Mannerton, and she spoke with a certain nervousness which she always felt when she ventured to trespass on the sacred sanctum of Sir Hugh's extremely conventional and well-appointed mind, and consequently very rapidly in order to express her entire meaning before she could be interrupted.

"Hugh, Mr. Vincent and May are becoming extremely intimate; he is unmistakably handsome; he is, to my mind, excessively charming; and he saved May's life; he spends the greater part of his days with her. Is it possible, under such circumstances, that the young people should not become attached to one another? You and I allow all this. Are *you* prepared," and she laid great emphasis on the *you*, "to face the probable consequences?"

"Mary," said Sir Hugh, and rare indeed were the occasions when he called Lady Mannerton by her Christian name, "it is difficult to understand what you can be thinking of! Do you mean to tell me," and he brought his hand with emphasis on the study table, "that that young man could be guilty of such impropriety as to think for a

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moment of the possibility of entering into a project of marriage with Lady May Roseby? Mr. Vincent indeed! Why, he comes from I know not where. I believe he is his uncle's nephew, and the Pendrells are decent people, but they are not the Durrells,"—and the baronet drew himself up in an attitude of lofty scorn,—"and I fancy his mother was some Italian contadina. I cannot suppose that the young man could be guilty of such impropriety."

Lady Mannerton knew her husband, and she had prepared herself for this outbreak. "Well, Sir Hugh," she said, falling into her usual quiet manner, "I do not think that young people look at these things quite as I imagine *you* do."

"*I* do!" said Sir Hugh, in an indignant voice, "and pray, Lady Mannerton, do *you* wish that your daughter, whom I have made the 'Child of Stafferton,' should marry an unknown stranger, of whose very origin we know absolutely nothing?"

Lady Mannerton felt that she had the better of her husband now, and she was no longer afraid.

"Well, Hugh," she said, "don't be angry. I have warned you, and I do think the young man exceedingly fascinating; we are under great obligations to him; and I wish to add that if we continue to treat him as we have been treating him, and then object to

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any projects he or May may form in relation to one another, we shall find ourselves acting a part at once cruel and unjust."

"Unjust!" thundered Sir Hugh, now facing straight round and glaring at his wife, "I think you do your daughter an injustice, and I think you forget the dignity of the Durrells."

"I don't know that I lay quite such stress as you do, Sir Hugh," and there was just a shade of scorn in her voice, "on what you call 'the dignity of the Durrells,' but I do know that my daughter has a woman's heart. *I* did not introduce Mr. Vincent here. I know your *peculiar* views about marriage, especially where Durrells are concerned. I have warned you; that is all," and her Ladyship swept with considerable dignity towards the door.

"Mary," said her husband, in a rather subdued voice, which induced her to stop for a moment with her hand on the handle, "perhaps you are right, I will speak to May."

"Do just what you please," answered Lady Mannerton, "but have a care what you say to May," and she left the room.

While this conversation, so big with fate for the two young people concerned, was in progress, those two young people, in happy unconsciousness, were enjoying their afternoon ride. They had gone along the

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road under the scaurs to Settlethorpe, and executed some commissions there, with which Lady Mannerton had entrusted her daughter, and had ridden homewards towards the park through the valley, and at last entered the park by an ordinary field-gate which led through a pretty glade where the woods were planted thickly, and the trees, in all the glory of their autumn clothing, were taking the splendour of the sinking sun. They had had some conversation on the question of that *Viaggio Dantesco* of which Will had spoken formerly, but which he had not described. It was not the subject of the conversation that was so different, but the manner was wholly changed. There was a *rapport* established between them since the morning of the 24th of June, of which each was only half-unconscious, but which none the less was a fact.

People do not pass together through grave perils, in the conduct of which admiration and trust have been called out on both sides, without a change having passed over the life of each; and this is especially true when the one is a beautiful woman, and the other a very handsome man, and when neither of them have seen the sun-dawn of two-and-twenty. As I have said, this was half-unconsciously felt, but it was felt very really, and there was an easy

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confidence in their conversation which there had not been three months before.

Something went wrong in the middle of the glade with the arrangement of Lady May's stirrup, and Vincent was off his horse in a moment, and prepared to help her to alight from her saddle. Quite naturally he lifted her off "Lady Dorothy's" back, and as he did so, some gust of feeling swept over him, and he pressed his lips to her forehead for a moment, and said in a low, quiet voice, "My darling, how I love you!" They were standing face to face under the autumn trees, and Lady May looked up at him with her quiet, earnest eyes, and with just the faintest flush upon her cheek, and said quietly and frankly,—

"Will, you must not speak to me so."

She had never called him by his Christian name before, and his heart gave a great bound within him, but he only said, "I never will, May darling, till you give me leave."

It was over in a moment, but they were both of them immediately conscious that Mr. Mothley, the vicar, was within a dozen yards of them, looking straight towards them, and coming down from a side-path in the wood. Mr. Mothley turned sharply down the glade, in the direction from which they had come, and

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raised his hat, Vincent did the same, and Lady May bowed. In another minute they were in their saddles and riding quietly home.

There was scarcely a word spoken till they reached the Court, and then Vincent simply said "good-night," as Lady May turned to ascend the steps, and walked slowly towards the Grange.

When Lady May was alone she hurried to her room and locked the door. For any woman to be told, by the man that she loves, that he loves her, is an epoch in her life of unparalleled interest. Lady May tossed off her riding-hat on her bed, and threw herself into a chair by the window; she buried her face in her hands, and burst into an agony of happy tears. They were very conflicting feelings that coursed through her heart.

She was very happy, *and* she was very miserable. She dared to say to herself, with no further need of maidenly reserve, that she loved Will Vincent with her whole heart, but she had that wisdom which confounds the world, and which comes to those who have simplicity of character and who fear God.

As for Vincent, she felt that he was very young, that he had had small experience of life, and—with a lover's enthusiastic admiration—that he was gifted, so she thought, far beyond herself. She had a

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generous feeling that in a sense *he* might feel bound to her by the strong tie of a community of danger, and she had a half-expressed apprehension of taking an undue advantage of such a tie; but besides all this, she knew Sir Hugh well—his family pride, his narrowness of mind, his unflinching obstinacy—and she had a deep and religious sense of filial obligation; she was glad, more glad than words could say, that Will loved her, but she was also thankful that she had answered him in the way she did.

She was wakened from her reverie by the sounding of the gong and her maid's knock at the door. She made a hurried toilet, and hastened down-stairs in time to be just a little late for dinner. Sir Hugh looked gloomy, and Lady Mannerton unusually haughty and troubled. Lady May felt certain that things somehow had not been right between him and her mother. The dinner was an effort, and the conversation flagged. When the ladies rose from the table, Sir Hugh, contrary to his custom, rose also.

"May," he said, with some severity, "I wish to see you in the library."

Lady Mannerton turned her head with a sort of half-laugh, and went towards the drawing-room, and Lady May followed Sir Hugh.

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Sir Hugh was just a little uncomfortable, for, in his heart, he was slightly afraid of Lady May; but family pride is a strong stimulus with natures like his,—brought up as he had been also in an unreal atmosphere, and with a fundamental conviction that the British Empire could scarcely advance unsupported by the dignity of the Durrells. Lady May walked simply after him, and stood on the hearth-rug, with her back to the library fire. Sir Hugh sank into a large armchair; now here he had made a strategic mistake, for it is always better to be on one's feet if one has to conduct an attack.

"Well, father?" said Lady May, in a quiet and interrogative tone.

Sir Hugh paused, stroked his beard outwards so as to drive it almost at right angles to its fundamental chin, cleared his throat twice, and then began. He gave a kind of historical sketch of the greatness and antiquity of the Durrell family, and then dwelt, not without some indication of fear in his voice, on the dignified position which Lady May occupied as being incorporated into so great a house.

"Dear father," she said simply, interrupting him, and looking him straight in the face, "I have never doubted the importance of your family, but my father's family is also a noble one, not that that much

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matters, and certainly not that that takes away from your kindness to me. Have I ever forgotten that? what do you mean?"

As Sir Hugh looked at her—and Sir Hugh really loved her—he thought her an astonishingly beautiful creature, and he didn't half like the task he had undertaken; but he was nobly bred, and he was in for it now.

"May," he said, "you love Mr. Vincent," and he stroked out his beard till it almost covered his nose.

"And if I do?" said Lady May, quite gently.

"May," said Sir Hugh in great agitation, "is it conceivable? is it possible?"

"Well, dear father," she said, looking down at him, "you seem to think it not only possible, but actual. I never said I loved Mr. Vincent."

"Oh, thank God, then, you don't!" said Sir Hugh, catching at a straw.

"No, father, not so fast," was the quiet answer. "If you must have the truth, I do."

"May," said Sir Hugh, gasping, "is it possible? Is it maidenly to confess your attachment to a young man when he has never spoken of it to you?"

"And how do you know, father, that he never has?" said Lady May.

"Do you mean to tell me," said Sir

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Hugh, and the tip of his beard almost reached his lower eye-lashes, "that he has dared to propose to you?"

"No, father," said Lady May, "I don't mean to tell you that, but I do mean to tell you this, that you have allowed us to be constantly together, nay, father, that you have encouraged it; that I owe my life to him; that he is the most noble-minded, honest, truest man I ever met," and her eyes were full of tears as she spoke; "and that you, being as a father to me, I have answered honestly. I love Will Vincent, and I am not ashamed to tell you of my love; yes, with my whole heart and soul," and now she spoke in great agitation, "but," and she threw herself on the floor at the baronet's knees, and clasped his hands in hers, "I also love you as a child should love a parent, and a parent who has been so good as you have. Mr. Vincent has not proposed to me, and I have therefore not accepted him, and I will never act in such a matter without openness towards you and my mother, nor without your approval. Still, you must let me say it, I cannot love the man whom I know you wish me to marry; I will never marry without your consent; but, father, I may remain unmarried, and I can be always happy in doing my duty to you; only do not ask me, do not ask me,

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to marry any one but Will Vincent while Will Vincent lives!" And then she laid her cheek against Sir Hugh's knee, and burst into tears.

"Sweet May," said Sir Hugh, for he was very fond of her, "you must not break my heart; but if it must be so, I will try not to ask it," and he leant over her head, and kissed her masses of golden brown hair.

"Thank you, dear father," she said, smiling up at him through her tears, "you are always very good to me. 'Good night,'" and she rose and kissed him and was gone.

Poor Sir Hugh! He sat alone for a moment or two, and felt that he had been defeated; and the situation was not improved for him when he found his wife in the drawing-room, and she only said in a half-sleepy, half-chilly manner, "Well, Sir Hugh?"

"She is like all women," he grumbled, "she always gets the best of it."

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CHAPTER IX.

CHANGE UPON CHANGE.

The conversation related in the last chapter took place on a Saturday night. Vincent had walked home quietly, not without hope, not without fear, as a man feels who has made a great venture, and has not been altogether defeated, and yet not quite sure that he has been altogether victorious. One thing he had long settled in his mind, that he loved Lady May, and now he felt that she knew it; and with the humility of an honest lover he felt himself all unworthy of the prize; and yet she had only checked, she had not rebuked him.

He had promised never so to speak to her again unless he had her distinct permission, and yet he had a secret hope, which buoyed him up, that some day that permission would not be withheld. He walked up and down the broad gravel-walk in front of the drawing-room windows of the Grange, and dreamily watched the autumn mists—as they drew their thin transparent gauze, silvered by the moon-

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light, over the autumn woods,—and he thought of many things.

One thing he felt sure of, with that strange power of presentiment with which the human soul is so often endowed before some startling catastrophe, that things for him were on the verge of a great change. This did not make him sad exactly, but only thoughtful.

Brave men at such times withstand the encroachments of enervating sadness. There seemed to run through his brain the echoes of a sacred strain:

"He shall not be afraid of any evil tidings, for his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord."

It would have been difficult for Vincent to say what exactly were his religious convictions, but his Italian childhood and his English manhood had—fortunately for him—been profoundly saturated with the Catholic Faith—the religion of common sense; by his nature he was deeply religious; he had lived a spotless life, all his relations with Lady May were noble and high-minded and good; certainly he had no fear. And yet the quiet sadness of the autumn evening had insensibly crept over him; he felt that a change was coming.

He found his uncle, as usual, seated in their little drawing-room, and expect-

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ing him—for he had said that he would not dine at the Court—but come home for dinner.

At dinner there was little conversation between uncle and nephew, and much of that unembarrassed silence which is possible on such occasions between only people who entirely understand one another.

The Sunday morning was bright and crisp and beautiful. Vincent and his uncle were as usual at the early Eucharist, and so were many village people, and so was Lady May. He was in no way disturbed by her presence, nor filled with anxious thoughts. He had long learnt, from his uncle, the first important duty of a Christian on a Sunday morning to join in "showing the Lord's death till He come," and he had been long enough in England to feel very deeply the tender pathos of an English Sunday in the country, so much more like the "rest that remaineth,"—especially where the English Church shows in her true Catholic colours —than anything else on earth. After matins Mr. Mothley stopped him as he was leaving the church, so did Sir Hugh. Sir Hugh seemed rather more bolt upright than usual, and he asked him—which was unusual,—to speak with him privately in the library, after dinner in the evening.

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To this Vincent, quite unsuspiciously, at once agreed. Mr. Mothley invited him to a walk in the afternoon, after his early dinner. To this he also agreed, and found himself accordingly at the vicarage door punctually at half-past two.

They took their way up the rugged path between the fells, every step of which he remembered so well, because here it was he had had his first confidence with Lady May, about her extraordinary dream.

They walked for some time in silence, and at last when they reached the very spot where Lady May and he had had their memorable conversation, the vicar proposed that they should sit down and enjoy the distant view. How different it all seemed to him now! When last he was there— only three or four months before—he scarcely knew Lady May, and now she seemed to belong to him, and to be part of his very life. He was startled from his dream by the vicar's abrupt words:

"Vincent, I saw you and Lady May in the wood yesterday, it seems scarcely straightforward not to tell you so."

"Yes, sir, I have nothing to be ashamed of," was Vincent's answer.

"I quite believe it, my dear boy," said the vicar kindly, putting his hand upon

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his knee, "but are you wise? are you wise?"

"I love Lady May, sir," said Vincent simply.

"I know it, my boy," was the vicar's answer, but he spoke in sad tones, and looked straight before him in a dreamy way, with eyes fixed upon scenes of the past which seemed only to bring him thoughts of sorrow. Then he turned to Vincent and added, "You do not know the Durrells as I know them. Sir Hugh is kind, but he is stiff and narrow, and holds the superstitions of his class with intense tenacity. This love 'can never find its earthly close.' I would not like to see a young life like yours wrecked in its opening promise. A disappointed love is a sad thing!" and the vicar sighed, "and this must be a disappointed love."

"Why so, sir? If I love her and she loves me, why should there be disappointment?"

"My dear boy," said the vicar, looking steadily at him, "Sir Hugh lays more stress upon a long lineage than upon a true heart, and, Will," he added, "I do not know your lineage, and I do not think you do yourself."

"I suppose I come of decent people," said Will, rather hotly. "My uncle's family has always been respectable. I do

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not understand your English pride of birth sir; I suppose my Italian notions are revolutionary."

"Well, well," said the vicar soothingly, "I meant no harm; my boy, she'll be a happy woman, to my thinking, that has you for a husband, whatever your lineage may be. I only meant, be warned, Will, be warned."

The rest of the walk was quiet and uneventful, but all that afternoon and evening certain words of the vicar's clung to the young man's mind, "You do not know your own lineage;" no, it was quite true, he knew nothing of his real father or mother, and his adopted father's silence as to his birth now struck him as extraordinary. This point, he was determined, must be cleared up.

Soon after evensong that evening, Will walked alone in the Court woods, revolving many things. He had told his uncle he would not be home for dinner, and Dr. Pendrell, who seemed never to care to interfere with his nephew's movements, did not seem surprised. Will waited till the hour came when he felt sure that dinner at the Court was over, and then—for since the episode of the fire he had gone in and out much as he pleased—he walked straight to the library.

The most quiet of days is, to some of us,

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the most exciting, when it is peopled by populous thoughts, and all this day, Will's brain and heart had been racked by perplexities and uncertainties, and now, alone in the library, he was almost in a state of nervous tension. Some change was coming. Why did Sir Hugh wish to speak to him? It had seemed most natural when the invitation was given, and now it seemed to him the strangest thing in the world.

The library at Stafferton Court is a long and lofty room. Bookshelves run up within a yard of the vaulted ceiling, and the space between that ceiling and the last line of shelves is partly filled with enclosed cupboards,—the receptacle of MSS. and valuable papers,—and the doors of these are in most cases covered with open metal-work, but at one end and immediately opposite the great fireplace they are closely enclosed. The panels which enclose them are covered with elaborately carved coats-of-arms in heavy oak work and of great age. Busts, of remarkable literary persons, frown down from the upper ledge of all, and below, on pedestals standing on the floor are similar busts supposed to be portraits of members of the family. Will rang the bell, and told the answering footman to let Sir Hugh know that he was there, and then,

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standing with his back to the fire, just where Lady May had stood the evening before, he gazed up straight before him and remembered Lady May's narrative of her dream. Suddenly, and for no accountable reason, he was seized with a longing to examine the interior of the cupboard immediately before him, but he had no long time to indulge his curiosity, for the door opened and Sir Hugh entered.

"Good evening, Mr. Vincent,"

"Good evening, Sir Hugh."

"Won't you be seated, Mr. Vincent?" as Sir Hugh sat down in the memorable armchair.

"Thank you, no," said Will, without any conscious sense that he like Lady May was assuming the best strategic attitude; and yet he did feel somehow that there was going to be war.

"Mr Vincent," began Sir Hugh, in very measured tones, "Lady Mannerton and I are under deep obligations to you."

"None, sir, none," interrupted Vincent warmly, "the obligations are all on the other side."

"Under deep obligations to you," continued Sir Hugh, not noticing the interruption. "You were the means, under Providence," said Sir Hugh, lowering his voice to a tone that was meant to be

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solemn and impressive, "of saving the life of Lady May Roseby."

Will rather shivered, for Sir Hugh had not been in the habit of using Lady May's family name before; but he said nothing, and looked straight before him.

"We feel our obligations," continued Sir Hugh, "and I hope by our conduct we have shown our proper sense of them."

"You have been very kind," interjected Will coldly.

"I do not know," went on Sir Hugh, "whether in *trying* to be kind, we have been properly prudent, and I think it necessary—you will forgive me, Mr. Vincent, if I speak plainly—I think that I ought—to make you distinctly understand the position of affairs. My daughter is, well, yes—not exactly—perhaps—I mean that I desire—that it is her mother's wish that she should be—that in fact therefore she is engaged to be married."

Will remained perfectly silent, but he felt the blood was going to his heart.

Sir Hugh went on, "General Sir William Marston is a man of age, of distinction, of wealth, of position, of *family*," and Sir Hugh laid a great stress upon the last word. "His property touches upon that of my family at Heath Cross; the match will be altogether a suitable one. Lady May Roseby is a dutiful child,

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and she understands our wishes. I don't think you have met Sir William Marston."

"I have not had that honour," said Vincent, with ice in his voice.

There was a dreadful pause. Sir Hugh cleared his throat and combed his beard forward, as his manner was, with much energy, and then resumed.,—

"I thought it only fair to tell you, Mr. Vincent; the relations in which you have stood to us are somewhat peculiar; your uncle is an old friend, and we have a great regard for you, a *just* regard for you, I may say. I felt I should be wrong if, in this matter, I had not taken you into my confidence."

"You are very good, Sir Hugh," said Vincent, turning and looking straight at the baronet. "You have been kind enough to say that you desire to act with straightforwardness towards me. I suppose I ought to act in a similar manner."

There was a touching grace in his Italian movement and in his handsome face, now pale as death, as the firelight fell upon it, which made the baronet gaze at him with breathless stillness. "Sir Hugh, it is true," he said, and in his voice there was the force of concentrated passion. "You have allowed me to be your daughter's constant companion; you have given me your confi-

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dence somewhat too late. You will not be surprised when I say to you with frankness equal to your own that I love Lady May Roseby."

Poor Sir Hugh! he positively gasped, and threw himself back in the ill-fated chair. Was this spot to be the death of all his family ambitions?

Here was the same story told over again by the other party in this unfortunate affair. Thank God, he thought, May was not present now, or his chance of vindicating the dignity of the Durrells would have been small indeed.

"Love her, young man!" he said; "and do you mean to tell me," and he spoke in a high-pitched voice in which energy of effort was meant to supply the place of convinced hopefulness, "do you mean to tell me, that you aspire to her hand? you sir, why, who are you? where do you come from? you don't know even who your father and mother were; and do you aspire to mate with the 'Child of Stafferton'?"

The horror of such audacity had given Sir Hugh real strength, and the terrible truth involved in his words had sent a cold shaft into Vincent's heart. Vincent, however, was thoroughly roused, the blood was rushing madly now through every vein, and he felt his very temples throbbing; but the

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old habit of strong self-command came to his aid.

"You have spoken hard words, Sir Hugh," he said in a voice of well-governed passion; "cruel words, I might almost say, but I can never forget your past kindness. You have said that I do not even know who my father and mother were; that is as it may be. Let me understand what you desire, and tell me this, if I show you that my lineage is not an unworthy one, will you permit me to be a suitor for the hand of Lady May Roseby?"

Sir Hugh was thoroughly unhappy; he did not wish to quarrel with Dr. Pendrell; he was really fond of Vincent.

"Mr. Vincent," he said, "I do not wish to be unkind, you must understand my difficulties; I can make no careless promises."

"Good," said Vincent firmly, for he had now quite recovered his calmness, "things cannot be between me and this house as they have been. When do you leave Stafferton, Sir Hugh?"

"We go to Heath Cross to-morrow week," was Sir Hugh's answer; he had no idea what the young man was driving at.

"Then," said Vincent, "I have only this favour to ask, that I may have the run of your library as I have had, and arrange your papers as I promised to do before you

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go, and—and—and," and he spoke in a low, constrained voice, "that some day between this and then I may see Lady May for half an hour to say good-bye. If you will grant me this, you shall not see me at the Court otherwise, again; nor shall you ever see me, Sir Hugh, when you are gone, unless when I can show you that my parents are at least not people to be ashamed of."

"My dear Mr. Vincent," said Sir Hugh, rising from his chair and taking his hand, "you have behaved nobly. I could only wish," Will winced as he said it, "that you were born of really gentle blood. I knew you would understand the situation. I felt that you would enter into my difficulties."

"Good-night, Sir Hugh," said Will.

"Good-night," was the answer, and they parted.

When Sir Hugh saw Lady Mannerton that night, he plumed himself upon his admirable tact, assured her that Mr. Vincent was a most estimable young man, who had had some natural leanings towards Lady May, but had quite felt the impropriety, and indeed impossibility, of indulging sentiments of the kind under the circumstances, and had with great good sense listened to his counsel, and banished such thoughts from his mind.

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Lady Mannerton knew her husband well, and she thought she knew human nature better than Sir Hugh, so she formed her own conclusions, and kept her own counsel. As for Will, when he went to the Grange that night he felt as if years had passed over him in the last four-and-twenty hours. Had he been rash? Well, the die was cast, and on the results of it seemed to him to turn happiness or misery. Change upon change, all things seemed changed. The old life had passed. The happy dream was broken. On one thing he was quite resolved, as he kept repeating his own words over and over—"that's as it may be"—that his uncle should be no longer allowed to maintain his now evidently mysterious silence, that he would know the worst, that he would learn who his parents were, and whence he came.

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CHAPTER X.

LAST DAYS AT STAFFERTON.

THERE are few things more strange, in literary history, than the story of the friendship between Boccaccio and Petrarch. So dissimilar in age, in attainments, and in moral elevation, as they actually were, it would have seemed impossible that two such men could have loved one another so sincerely and so nobly as they actually did. Scarcely less strange was the relationship of devotion and loyalty between Doctor Pendrell and William Vincent.

The tie that bound them was not like the tie of uncle and nephew; there was nothing conventional about it, nothing that required affection as a duty, whether it came or not; they loved each other sincerely, and even tenderly. Will Vincent had whole worlds of thought that he did not often share with his adopted father, but he had an instinctive sense that, if he did share them, he would always be met with ready sympathy, and moments did come from time to time when naturally, and without reserve, he spoke to him as he would speak to no other living soul. He

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had a boundless admiration for his uncle's great capacity, for his width of reading, and for his quiet, sterling goodness, and the doctor, on the other hand, had a scarcely disguised admiration for the gifts, the tastes, the enthusiasms, of Italian origin, and the manliness and straightforward directness of character, of English origin, in his graceful and handsome nephew. There is, by nature's ordering, a strange deep and unspoken sympathy quite peculiar and extraordinarily beautiful, between an older and a younger man, when they can trust one another, and have had reason to love, unlike anything else of the kind in the world. They did not speak much of their affection, as the habit of strong men is, but they always understood one another, they went their own ways, led their own lives, trusted one another entirely, enjoyed one another's society when circumstances so permitted; and there were times when the doctor caressed his nephew as a mother might her child, and Will understood it and loved him for it, and in a simple, unembarrassed and most real fashion showed him the warmest marks of affection in return.

For many years indeed the boy had been the real centre of the old man's life, he had never had him out of his heart wherever he was and whatever he did; but he had never

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allowed his personal affection to interfere with what he thought was best for the boy, and, half-unconsciously to Vincent himself, he had impressed upon him his own strong principles, and his own deeply religious character. On one point Vincent had always felt that his uncle had been strangely reticent. He had avoided every allusion to his father and mother, and he had never directly or indirectly explained to him why he had come to live at Stafferton.

Real, pure, strong love—the love of woman—is an epoch in any true man's life. His love for Lady May, and the circumstances which had attended it, and especially the circumstances of that Saturday and Sunday, had awakened Vincent, as a sleeper is awakened by a shock, from the land of dreams. He felt that his uncle had avoided certain difficult questions; he felt for his uncle, in approaching such questions now, but he also felt that they could be avoided no more. It was therefore with a sensation of nervousness and almost of awe that he determined after breakfast on that Monday morning that he must force the doctor to tell him the truth about the matter.

Doctor Pendrell had a habit of retiring to his study after breakfast to write his

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letters, and, ordinarily speaking, Will never followed him there; usually he wandered about the garden, talked to old Lucia, and then settled down to his painting, or his reading, till either he lunched with his uncle, or paid a visit to the Court. This Monday morning he paused for a moment or two in the breakfast-room to summon up his courage before he knew the worst. Then he followed his uncle into his study. He walked straight into the room, with his hands in his pockets, and stood gazing out of the window. He never forgot, in after years, the look of the golden woods on that September morning, and the blue mists, and the quiet slopes of grass and the rough grey craggs, as he saw them from the study at the Grange. It is a strange thing in human nature, but it is true—a witness to the all-pervading power of the human soul—that we take in subsidiary accidents with a stronger grip, when the mind is intensely concentrated upon some central and absorbing thought.

"Pater," he said, without turning round, "tell me where I was born, and who were my parents; tell me also why we are living at Stafferton?"

It had cost him much to ask the questions of his life, and he felt a sense of relief that the thing was done; here they were, in a nut-shell. On the answer to

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those three questions he felt that his fate was hanging.

The doctor laid down his pen, "I will tell you, my boy," he said, "if you really are resolved to know; but tell me this first, why do you ask?"

"The reason is this," answered Will quietly, "I love Lady May Roseby, and Sir Hugh has assigned, as his objection to the consequences of that fact, that my origin is obscure and problematical. Pater dear, I would know the truth."

"You shall, Will," said his uncle, with a sigh, "but I would, my boy, that I had been spared the speaking, until, as I have always hoped, I might answer your questions more distinctly!

You were born in Perugia, of that there is no doubt; you are the son of William Durrell, who was the younger brother of Sir Hugh. Your mother was a most beautiful woman, and, from the little that I saw of her, of unquestionable charm; her name was Maria Vincente, and she was a member of a family, poor, but not undistinguished in the uplands of Umbria; but what the relations between your father and your mother were, Will, I cannot exactly tell you. I believe that they were legally married, but I don't know, and I have never been able to possess myself of a proof. Your father was my dear friend, but he hated the

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restraints of that family pride which was the curse to his race. He was an artist of considerable ability, with a passionate love for Italy, and yet in many respects every inch an Englishman. His marriage—if legal marriage there was—was, like many other things that he did, sudden and secret. Only twice did I meet your mother, and then he avoided all direct statements about her, and he was not a man who would permit prying into matters which he chose to keep to himself. I met her twice, once at Aquila on a summer tour when I spent a night with him, once at a great ball in the Doria Palace in Rome, when I remember that she was looking extraordinarily beautiful, and when certainly he treated her as his lawful wife. She died at Perugia, and with her died the infant, your sister, whose birth cost the mother her life; so I have heard. Writing to me shortly afterwards, your father said that Maria was dead, and that he was in unspeakable sorrow. During the three years of his life, after her death, he never alluded to her nor to you. He went to England, and by his father's permission spent a night here at Stafferton immediately before your grandfather's death, and only three or four months before his own. About a month before that sad event, he was in Rome for a week, and one night he spent with me. I re-

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member it well. Rome was growing empty, for the heats of June were coming, and we wandered out, through the city, in the warm summer night. We attended a Quarant'ore at Santa Croce in Jerusalemme; for your father, though, like me always a devout English Churchman, loved these beautiful devotions of the Roman Church. We wandered through the vignas to the Latin gate, and up to the terrace of the Lateran. I remember his quiet, sad delight, in gazing through the moonlight, over that unmatched landscape of the Campagna flanked by the Alban hills. He was a real artist," and the doctor's voice trembled as he said it, "and, Will, my son, this is my confidence about your birth, he was a noble-minded man. We parted that night at Trevi, and as we parted, after talking of quite other things, he grasped my hand and said very earnestly, 'I have a son, Charles, a child of four years old; if anything should happen to me—my father, you know, has disowned me—you will be a father to the boy?' They were the last words I ever heard from his lips. 'I will,' I answered, and we parted. I hope, my boy, I have kept my promise," and the old man's head sank on the study table.

"Dear, dear pater," said Will, "you have, indeed; you have been father and mother to me!" and now he was by the

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old man, and his hand was across his shoulder, and his cheek laid against his grey hairs, and, if any one had been there to see it, Will Vincent's eyes were filled with tears. The lad had that greatness of possessions for a true manly nature; he had a heart.

"I don't know, my boy, I don't know," the doctor went on. "I had a short note from your father, written the day before his death, asking me to take you to my house, as he was ill and perhaps might not recover, and saying that he had told his father *all*. I went straight to Perugia, in time only to find that all was over. I took you to my house. I called you by your mother's name, hoping to save you from embarrassments if things were not right. People took you for my nephew, and I allowed them to think so; you know that you have been to me not a nephew, but a son; you know the rest. No, you do not know it all. I made every inquiry, I hunted every church in Perugia and the neighbourhood, but I could find no shadow of a proof of the marriage. I visited England. I was very wary but very searching in my inquiries, and I found that your uncle—your real uncle, I mean, Sir Hugh Durrell—was thoroughly convinced that his brother had died unmarried. One thing I did not tell him; I did not tell him that his brother had a son. I kept the secret for your sake, my boy,

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for if the legitimacy of the marriage could not be proved, I thought things would be better for you in that case, as they are. I hope I was not wrong; I hope I was not wrong; I did it for the best."

"You were quite right, pater," said Will, warmly, "you acted like your own dear self, but what do you really think?"

"Stop, my boy," said the doctor. "I have always believed, and I do believe, that there was a lawful marriage. I have never ceased my efforts to discover the truth, and I am trying in Italy now. The difficulty is, the Vincenti are all gone. Lucia has a strong conviction that they were never married lawfully, for her young mistress left her father's house secretly, and her father, who was a stern, hard man, and who believed like Lucia, never saw your mother again. You ask me why I came to Stafferton. I felt so convinced that the truth was as I think it is, that I imagined somehow it would come out—and Will, I think so still; and I felt that you ought to know and love the place, of which one day I believed you would be master. If I had not felt that strong conviction, I would have interfered when I saw things going as they have been going between you and Lady May Roseby. I thought such a state of things the best that could be, both for you and for Sir Hugh. God

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forgive me, my boy, if I have brought upon you a great sorrow! I have earnestly opposed the match that Sir Hugh intends between Lady May and Colonel Marston, but, my boy, my boy, I am as far from the proof as ever. Until I have it, I dare not call you anything, to the world, but my nephew, William Vincent. To me, whatever happens, you will always be my most dear son. Now you know all."

It is more easy to imagine than to describe the mingled feelings with which Will heard the doctor's narrative, but hope is strong in the young and ardent, and the predominating feeling in the young man's mind was relief, and even joy.

"Father," he said at last, gravely, "you have acted well by me, and if I ransack every church in Italy, and if I cross-examine every syndic, the proof of that marriage shall be found. Cheer up, dear father, for if a hundred Sir Hughs were uncles to me by blood, you, by goodness and affection, are more than all of them, you are my father for ever, and May shall bless you for it yet."

The old man rose from his chair and pressed the young man to his heart, as he had done a thousand times when he was a boy, and kissed him again and again, as a father kisses his son.

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CHAPTER XI.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

WILL VINCENT kept his promise faithfully to Sir Hugh. His mind was far too full of all he had heard to care for walking, or riding, or even for his beloved gun; and the closing matches of cricket at Settlethorpe saw nothing of him on those bright September days. He spent the greater part of every day in the library at the Court. Sir Hugh was with him much, and watched him with interest as he re-arranged, with care and dexterity, the books of his large and valuable collection, which had gradually fallen into extreme confusion. They made no allusion to their conversation of the previous Sunday; Sir Hugh believed that the young man's propriety of sentiment had placed him in his proper place, and Will had a secret conviction that he possessed the clue to a secret, which would one day place him in very different relations with this man, whom he now knew to be his uncle. Will walked in the afternoons, more than he had been lately accustomed to do, with

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the doctor. They were happy days for the doctor, for he loved having the boy as his companion. They talked quite freely on the subject nearest both their hearts, and at last it was arranged between them that, as soon as the family left Stafferton, Will should return to Italy.

The Marchesa di Spoleto, so the doctor told Will, was the only person who knew the secret, besides Lucia and himself. The Marchesa had been a friend of Will's father; she was an Italian, was now a widow, had had English connections, had inherited some property in England, and possessed a house in Chesham Place, where she resided when in London; but she lived ordinarily in Rome, and it was agreed between them that Will should make the Palazzo Spoleto his head-quarters, when he returned to Italy. The doctor wrote to the Marchesa accordingly, and received an enthusiastic reply, the following week, to the effect that Vincent would be welcomed on his arrival. During this week Will never saw Lady May, and this was all the more easy because Stafferton was filled with company, among whom, though Will did not know it at the time, was Colonel Marston. Had he known it, he probably might not have been so diligent at his books; but, whether from chance or by Sir Hugh's arrangement, Will had the

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library very much to himself. He never touched the upper cupboards, which were filled with unsorted papers, until he found the family safe at the dinner-table. There was plenty of work to do in arranging these papers, and it was the Saturday night before he reached the closed cupboard opposite the fireplace. It was filled, at one end, with deeds and law papers, and at the other with a pile of unsorted letters addressed to the late baronet. Will stood on the top of some library steps to carry on his work, and in sorting out these letters he suddenly came on one which had evidently never been opened, for it was carefully sealed, and had been tossed aside amongst a bundle of others and stored by, at the time of the late baronet's death, without sufficient scrutiny. In faded ink there was an address on the envelope, "To my father," and in the lower left-hand corner was written in a bold strong hand, "William Durrell." When Will saw the letter his heart beat fast, but something made him glance down into the library, and as he glanced he clutched at the ladder, and his heart seemed almost to stop.

Standing below him in the centre of the room, was a man. It seemed to him that the old portrait in the hall had suddenly come to life, for, pointing straight towards

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him, with a face pale as death, and an expression of agonized suspense, he saw old Sir Hugh, and in another instant, there seemed to sweep up the room, past the ladder, past Sir Hugh, and towards the corner of the tower door, a beautiful boy. Sir Hugh's hand seemed to fall by his side as the child passed, and, as Will watched, the little fellow seemed to turn and gaze at him for a moment, and then to utter a piercing shriek, and both the apparitions were gone.

Was he in a dream? was he mad?

He remembered Lady May's narrative, he remembered what he himself had seen upon the terrace, he remembered what she had said, that they never appeared—so people asserted—unless to foretell some dreadful sorrow to the Durrells.

Will was a brave man, but the very hairs were rising on his head, he felt that his limbs were trembling, and there was a cold sweat upon his brow. Just then he was brought to himself by the sound of merry voices in the hall, and Sir Hugh's step at the library door. He closed the cupboard quickly, and thrust the valuable letter into the breast pocket of his coat; but he was only half way down the ladder, when the door was thrown wide open, and Sir Hugh was in the room. Immediately behind him a gentleman was following, and

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Will could see that he turned for a moment before entering the library and spoke.

"We shall soon join you in the drawing-room, and I am sure your ladyship will let us hear your violin."

"Certainly, if my father wishes it," was the answer in a cold, clear voice, which Will knew perfectly, and under the strong light in the hall, for now he had reached the floor and was facing the doorway he saw Lady May.

It was only for an instant, but lovers' eyes are sharp, and he saw the long sweep of her soft, white muslin gown, and the bunch of geraniums and fern fastened on the left side by a small brooch, and her mass of golden brown hair, and her dark blue eyes, and her lips redder than ever, while her face was paler, and the fan that hung from her belt, and, with which her right hand played nervously as with a haughty toss of her beautiful head, and with just the slightest shadow of a curtsey, she swept round from the speaker, and in front of Lady Mannerton followed a bevy of other ladies who were moving towards the drawing-room.

It was all over in an instant, but Will had seen it all, and with his quick Italian perceptions, he knew, before Sir Hugh had uttered a word, that he was about to be introduced to his rival. For a

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moment the fierce Italian jealousy in him sprang like a demon full armed into his brain, but it was only for a moment; Will was also English, and he was a gentleman.

"Allow me, Sir Charles Marston," said Sir Hugh, as the gentleman behind him followed him into the room, "to make known to you my young friend, Mr. Vincent, the clever young Italian that I spoke of, who has been good enough to rearrange my library."

"I have much pleasure," said Colonel Marston, and he walked forward frankly, and held out his hand to Vincent.

Will intended to be very angry, and the condescending tone of Sir Hugh had nettled him, but there was something about the officer's manner, frank and cordial, which disarmed him at once.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, sir," he said, perhaps with more politeness than truth. "I have heard of you from Sir Hugh Durrell, but I did not know that you were now at Stafferton."

"I came rather suddenly," said the Colonel, in a quiet, easy manner, "I am always glad to come to Stafferton;"—Will winced as he heard the words;—"Lady May Roseby has sung your praises, and I desired to make your acquaintance; so we have fled from the gentlemen and the

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wine. I am familiar with Italy, and I am a humble admirer of Dante, with whom, I believe, you are familiar. It is not every day one meets with an Italian who is also an Englishman, and I understand from Lady May that you possess the gifts of two great nations."

"I am sure Lady May is very good," said Will, and he blushed as he said it, hardly knowing whether he was more angry or pleased. He did not quite like this quotation from Lady May, coming from the lips of the Colonel; but he had a secret joy in thinking that her heart and her lips were eloquent about him. "I am scarcely in a condition to discuss Italy and Dante with you," he said laughingly, "for in fact I am a mass of dust. By Sir Hugh's kindness, I have been rummaging through his books and papers, till I am scarcely fit to be seen."

They talked for a few minutes on indifferent matters, and then Sir Hugh, feeling that enough had been done, remarked, "I am afraid we can hardly persuade you to join us in the drawing-room, but if you will do so, Lady Mannerton will be glad to see you."

"Thank you, no," said Vincent, "I am scarcely in suitable toilette for her ladyship's drawing-room. Give my best respects to her ladyship; my father will be

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expecting me; I think, Sir Hugh, I will wish you good night."

The three gentlemen passed into the hall, and Will immediately left the house.

"He is an extremely handsome man," said Colonel Marston, as he assisted Lady May in arranging some music on the stand for her violin, "and he has an air about him very distinguished, quite remarkable; and, do you know, I almost fancy that he has a likeness to that old Durrell portrait in the hall."

"Yes, people say so," said Lady May coldly; "he is good-looking, and something like the Durrells; but, then, they are very dark, and so are all Italians, I suppose," and there the conversation dropped.

As Will went down the steps he muttered to himself. "And they would sell my May to that old man; he is an officer and a gentleman, that's clear, but he might be her grandfather; never, if I can help it!" and he clenched his fist as he walked away.

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CHAPTER XII.

TIME WILL SHOW.

PRINCIPLES are like rocks to a drowning man. Shorn of the accidents of life, there are truths and convictions which stand us in stead in the roughest weather. Will Vincent had passed through many phases of feeling in that eventful day, but there was one thing on which he had been resolved, quite simply and naturally, apart from his phases of feeling, viz. that he intended to make his confession that night, and to make his Communion in the morning. He had grown up, thanks in great measure to his uncle, in a religion of serious reality; he knew little of the various controversies which had troubled the English Church; he had felt, from his early childhood, the beauty of all that was beautiful in Latin Christendom, but he had felt instinctively, as well as learnt in his religious education, that there were certain serious faults in the Roman Communion, and that, being essentially Latin, her claim to represent the whole Catholic body was not only unhistorical, but, as it seemed to him,

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absurd; he knew also, however, that she was, on her better side, a very strong and faithful witness to serious truths and religious customs which belonged to the whole Catholic Church; and from having lived so long in Italy, such truths and customs had been all the more deeply impressed upon him—and among them that of sacramental confession. It had never struck him that it would be less wise for a man to confess his own sins, particularly and definitely, to his Master, in the presence of his accredited representative, than to confess them, vaguely and generally, in a public service, and in union with others. His uncle had taught him a serious simple system of devotion, and it had grown with his growth. From time to time, therefore, since the days when first he had become conscious of personal responsibility, he had seriously and very regularly made his confessions. The fine-drawn arguments of extreme Protestantism had passed over the clear heaven of his soul, as a cloud passes over a summer sky, driven by a wind. The idea that Christ's ministers should minister to his own soul, when he needed their ministrations, he knew to be the teaching of the English Church, representing to him the mind of the Catholic body, and it commended itself to his clear common

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sense. It was natural to him, therefore, when he left the Court that night, to spend half an hour in quiet prayer in his own room, and then to walk across to the vicarage, and ask the vicar to hear his confession. It never occurred to him that, in doing so, he was placing the vicar between his soul and God, any more than the thought that the action of the food he ate and of the parents from whom he sprang, were interposed between his own personality and the Being who gave and sustained his life; much less did it occur to him that the vicar was likely, in hearing his confession of sin, to pry into personal or family matters, in which there was no sin at all. He knew that it cost him an effort to make his confession, and he knew that the pain of that effort was salutary and deserved, but it had occurred to him, and his uncle had impressed it upon him, that the English system was wiser than the Roman, because it was more free, because it threw more of the weight of responsibility upon the individual conscience, and less upon the priest. He knew that it had helped him to be a more faithful, a purer, a more manly, a more simple-minded man, to submit to the discipline of the Church. He made his confession, simply and straightforwardly, at the feet of his Saviour, and received the "benefit of absolution" with

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faith from that Saviour, at the hands of His priest. After his confession he had a conversation for a quarter of an hour with the good vicar about his many difficulties, which were not sins, and then went home, to say his evening prayer, with that rest of mind which is given to those who have real faith in the promises of God.

The Sunday morning broke clear and bright, in its autumn stillness, over the woods of Stafferton. Will Vincent made his Communion with his uncle, in the early morning, and it was a joy to him to notice that Lady May made hers. In after years he never forgot that Sunday; a peace came to him from nature and grace which he needed much in the "changes and chances" of our mortal life, and which never forsook him entirely.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when he walked across to the Court; he went straight to the library, where, the servant told him, Sir Hugh was alone. The baronet was seated at the table, writing letters, and leant back in his chair and stretched out his hand to him, very kindly, as he came forward to greet him.

"Sir Hugh," he said, "I have come to claim your promise; I have come to ask Lady May to spend half-an-hour with me, that I may say good-bye; I do not choose to do so without telling you of it first."

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"I never go back from my word," said Sir Hugh, in a tone that was meant to be proud and determined, but he moved uneasily in his chair; "but you understand, Mr. Vincent, that Lady May is engaged to Colonel Marston, and you must never forget that fact."

"Thank you, Sir Hugh," was Vincent's answer, "I understand your meaning, though"—and he half-laughed as he said so—"I do not know that I quite accept your conclusion," and he promptly turned on his heel and left the room.

When the door closed, the baronet threw himself back in his chair, and locked his hands behind his head. "The boy is extraordinarily handsome," he muttered to himself, "and I can't think why it is, he takes my heart with his manly straightforwardness; he looks to me this afternoon strangely like my poor brother William, and yet he has twice his grace and manner; poor William!" And the old man threw his head forward on his hands on the table, and remained in silent thought for a few minutes before he resumed his letters.

When Will Vincent left the library he walked straight to the drawing-room. Lady Mannerton was seated at one side of the fire, and opposite her, playing with a little fox terrier, Judy by name, was Lady Dorothy of Ravensthorpe—the same who

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edited the MSS. of the famous Lady Dorothy, her mother, which she published, as the "Broken Vow."

"Dear Mr. Vincent," said Lady Mannerton, in her quiet, easy manner, with just the faintest twinkle of fun in her eye, "I am so glad to see you again. You have quite exiled yourself, or somebody has exiled you, from us this last week. May is quite hurt by your absence, she will be so glad to see you. By the way, do you know Lady Dorothy Holt-Masham? I know you know May's mare, 'Lady Dorothy,' and they both hail from Ravensthorpe. Lady Dorothy, Mr. Vincent," and she languidly inclined her head first to one, and then to the other.

Vincent made a profound bow, but, in his heart, he was thinking all the time that there was only one person in the world that at all surpassed that incomparable Lady Mannerton. Lady Dorothy did *not* make a profound bow, but she rose from her chair, and walked straight up to him and held out her hand:—

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Vincent," and she looked straight at him with her large clear eyes; "but I fancy that you waste your time in talking to me and Lady Mannerton; that sweet little May has told me all about you, and I believe she expected you to show her some fine

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view from the woods this afternoon; they tell me," and she laughed a merry laugh, "that you find the scaurs of Stafferton almost as beautiful as the crags of Umbria. Lady Mannerton must bring you some day to Ravensthorpe, then I will show you scenery which beats them both. Go away, don't stand here, May is waiting for you in her sitting-room, and I am told that you found your way there once, through flood andfire."

Will mumbled something about thanks and the honour she had done him, and got himself somehow out of the room. He thought he heard the two ladies laughing; and for his part he didn't wonder, if Lady Dorothy's mother was at all like Lady Dorothy, that Sir Walter had loved her as they say he did. He had his foot on the great staircase, when the door opened, and Lady Dorothy called after him, "Mr. Vincent, when you have had your walk with May, you may take a walk with me."

"Thank you," said Vincent, looking back from the staircase; and the door was shut.

"I never saw such a beautiful creature," said Lady Dorothy, "since I saw my own father."

Lady Mannerton yawned and then said languidly,—

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"Sir Hugh thinks she won't marry him, but that she will marry that well-seasoned old colonel. Sir Hugh was brought up among the Durrells," and her ladyship pushed forward the points of her pretty feet a little nearer to the fire.

"I have no patience with Sir Hugh," said Lady Dorothy; "of course she will marry him, and of course she ought. What does May want with estates and money? she has enough and to spare."

Lady Mannerton yawned.

"You are as impetuous and viewy as your mother, Dorothy; you are a real Ravensthorpe, all for 'love in a cottage.' I like people to please themselves."

"Love in a cottage, indeed!" said Lady Dorothy, walking towards the window, "Stafferton and Heath Cross are pretty tolerable cottages; and that young fellow has talents and a heart, if his face does not belie him, to make her happy if she hadn't a penny."

"My dear Dorothy, you don't know the Durrells," answered Lady Mannerton, looking quietly into the fire, "*they* think that Providence had a special arrangement for their creation and establishment before the rest of the work was taken in hand."

"Mary," answered Lady Dorothy, "you know as well as you are sitting there,

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you can make Sir Hugh do whatever you please, if only you will take the trouble."

"I don't know anything of the kind," said Lady Mannerton; but I'm afraid her ladyship did not quite speak the truth.

When Vincent found himself outside the door of Lady May's sitting-room, he couldn't help pausing for a moment to remember the last time that he had stood there. Stood! that he had fallen there after a tremendous spring across a gulf of angry flames, and the thought of it nerved him to knock with decision, and a happy sense that he had a right to do so.

Lady May was standing ready dressed for her walk at the very window, or rather the successor to the very window, out of which he had borne her on that terrible night.

"I thought you would come," she said, as she walked across quite naturally to take his hand; "mother said you had promised to come, and so I got ready for a walk."

Vincent felt grateful to Lady Mannerton for her assertion, though he could not recall at the moment when the promise had been made.

"We can get out of the room more easily to-day," he said, laughing, "than we could on the 24th of June, can't we?"

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"I shall never forget that terrible morning," said May, with a shudder, as they passed down the stairs, "shall you?"

"Never," said Vincent, but in his heart he did not think the memory of it altogether terrible.

They walked quietly, almost silently along the terrace, and Vincent felt uncomfortably conscious, as they passed the drawing-room windows. He had no clear idea where he was going, or what he was going to say to Lady May; he only knew the joy of having her near him, and the pain in his heart from the remembrance that he was about to say good-bye. They wandered on, down the main avenue towards the valley, and struck into the woods. It was not long before they found themselves in the very glade where he had first, so rashly, revealed to her his love. He remembered the whole thing, as if it had been yesterday. There was the oak-tree by which the horses had stopped; there was the little bye-path down which the vicar had so unexpectedly come; and in his ears rang May's own words and his immediate promise.

They paused under the tree, and he faced full round towards her, and took both her hands in his. She did not draw her hands away, but stood quietly looking up at him. "May," he said, "when

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last we stood here, you told me never to speak so to you again, and I promised I never would, without your permission. May I speak so, now?"

Her eyes dilated for a moment, but she never turned them from his face. "You may," she said in a low voice.

"Well, then, May," he answered, "I love you with my heart and soul. Can you give me back such love?"

"Will, dear," she said, "I can."

The young man strained her to his heart, for a moment. "Oh, May, my love, my own, my darling," he said, "I have to say good-bye to you to-day, and I must not see you again till I can prove my right to love you; you are free as air, May, but I can never love another, and never will, as I love you."

Her head was on his breast now, and her tears were falling fast. "Dear Will," was all she could say.

"May I hope, my little one," he said, "that some day you will be my own?"

"Will," she answered, looking straight up at him through her tears, "I can never love another as I love you; and whatever comes, while you live, I will never marry another man."

He gazed at her for one moment, then folded her to his heart, and their lips met in the first long kiss of love, pure and true

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and faithful—the truest symbol, in this sad earth, of that heavenly love that is above us all.

They were very silent as they walked back towards the Court, but very happy; for there is no happiness on earth, whatever shadows pass across it, like loyal and unfaltering love. When they reached the steps at the southern door, which led to Lady Mannerton's private sitting-room, Lady Dorothy was standing there ready for a walk, with a walking-stick in her hand, and accompanied by Lady May's small terrier, Judy, and a huge deer-hound who rejoiced in the name of Cæsar.

"Sir Hugh is looking for you, May," she said. "He thinks it is rather late for the view from the Scaurs, and assured me that Mr. Vincent believed that half an hour would be enough to take you to the spot and back. I think you have gone a circuitous route, Mr. Vincent," she added, laughing. "I thought the scene was behind the Court, and you seem to me to have come from the woods."

"Dear Lady Dorothy," said May, with a beseeching look from eyes where the tears were still undried. But Lady Dorothy only took her face between her hands and kissed her lips.

"You sweet little puss," she said; "be quick, or Sir Hugh will have all the ser-

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vants looking for you;" and then Lady May fled past her into the house. "And now, Mr. Vincent," she said, turning to Will, "it's my turn. Where shall we walk to? It is rather chilly this autumn afternoon for the Scaurs. I have a taste for ghosts and churchyards. Suppose we meditate among the tombs."

Will was only a boy, after all, and he felt as if he had known Lady Dorothy a hundred years. They walked briskly past the house and down the avenue, towards the village; and as they went down the village street beside the beck, Lady Dorothy scolded Judy and whistled to Cæsar, and stopped to talk here and there to village children, who were straggling home from Sunday school. They crossed the bridge and turned up the other side of the beck till they reached the churchyard gate.

"I don't like the look of the place," she said, "let us go straight on to that gap in the hills; the sunset will be fine from there, and if you are the artist they tell me you are, you love a sunset, even in England."

When they reached the opening in the hills they turned to gaze. Immediately below them lay the quiet village and the rushing beck; beyond, the towers of Stafferton, and beyond again the golden woods,

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and all across the heavens, which formed the background of woods and hills and valley, was one broad wash of burning crimson dying off in delicate gradations into purest blue. It was one of those autumn evenings in which nature never does her artist's work more perfectly than amidst the moors of Yorkshire.

"Never mind the sunset!" said Lady Dorothy, after gazing, however, silently for several minutes. "What I want to know is how things stand. That sweet little May has told me plenty; I want you to tell me more."

"Your ladyship is very good," began Will.

"Ladyship fiddlesticks!" said Lady Dorothy. "You love little May, I suppose? That goes without saying."

"That I do," said Will, "and no mistake." And he began to feel now very much at home. "Who could help it?"

"Well, that's neither here nor there," said Lady Dorothy. "I know all about you from Lady Mannerton and May herself. I suppose you have told her so?"

"I have, this afternoon," said Will, "and before."

Lady Dorothy laughed. "I don't suppose she needed the telling. My dear Mr. Vincent, tell me what is the difficulty?"

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"Sir Hugh—" began Will.

"Sir Hugh, stuff!" interrupted Lady Dorothy. "You don't mean to be stopped by Sir Hugh, do you? Listen, Mr. Vincent. I have known May Roseby since she was a baby, and there are few people like her in this world. If you are true to her, she will be true to you, and Lady Mannerton has told me the whole story; she is all on your side. For once too she is inclined to take trouble. That is what I wanted to tell you, and she will never allow her to be married to that old man while you are above ground."

"There is a difficulty, Lady Dorothy," said Will Vincent gravely; "my acquaintance with you is very short, but I am certain that I can trust you, I know that you are an old friend of my father, I mean Dr. Pendrell, and I will tell you all."

And then he told her his mysterious story, but he did not tell her, for he had resolved to tell that to no one as yet, that he carried in the pocket of his coat that unopened letter.

Lady Dorothy looked very grave.

"My dear young friend," she said, "it is serious, but it is far from hopeless. I knew your father, your actual father, knew him well in Rome, but, strange to say, I never knew a word of this. What a fool I was! I know now why I trusted and

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believed in you, though I have only first seen you a few hours ago. You are as like your father as man can be to man, and William Durrell never did a dishonourable thing, with all his wild Bohemian ways; he was the pick of that flock. You are right, Mr. Vincent, go to Italy, and search it out, there is nothing in all this world," she added, and he thought there were tears in her eyes as she spoke, "like pure and loyal love. I will stand your friend, I promise you; I love May Roseby, and, for your father's sake," she added gently, "you will let me love you too. Be faithful to her, Mr. Vincent,—'Will,' may I call you? whatever happens, be faithful to her, through darkness and light, through storm and sorrow, it will all come right in the end."

"I will," said Vincent solemnly, "and thank you, more than I can say."

They walked quietly homewards and parted at the gate of the Court. Will Vincent felt very happy, but very serious. Some scenes print themselves into our memories in characters of burning fire; amidst the changes and sorrows of a strange and troublous life, they stand out clearly, vivid to the last, the scenes which are the crises of our destiny. And in after days, when all his power of resolution and patience and faith were taxed

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to straining point, Will Vincent found courage to do right from the memory of that talk to Lady Dorothy, and still more from the memory of that autumn path, where he had folded May to his heart and called her his own,—his own by the bond of a love that nothing really could slacken—on that his last quiet Sunday afternoon in happy, peaceful Stafferton.

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CHAPTER XIII.

DE PROFUNDIS.

THE family left the Court on the following Tuesday afternoon. On the Monday all their visitors had dispersed; all but one; for Colonel Marston was to accompany them to Heath Cross. Vincent honourably avoided the Court for those two days, and the days hung heavy on his hands in consequence. Once they were all gone, he spent much time in the library, for the two or three days following, finishing his work, and among the papers, in the closed cupboard, he found what seemed to him to be two treasures more, the one was a letter of his great-grandfather, which descanted much on the supernatural apparitions seen in the Court, and described in a vivid manner precisely what he had witnessed himself; it went on to say that these apparitions invariably seemed to foretell some sorrow or misfortune to the family; that the writer believed old Sir Hugh to have been the real criminal in the death of "the Child;" that his sin had been steadily visited upon his children, and would never,

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he believed, quite be cleared away, until the mystery of that child's murder had been cleared up. The other document, which seemed to Will of real personal interest, was a short and quaint statement of the genealogy, the greatness and troubles of the family, written evidently soon after the time of the old Sir Hugh, written clearly in a woman's hand, but in a fine and beautiful character of the seventeenth century, and closing with the extraordinary distich, which set Will a-thinking :—

> "Love rules ; when nought else remains
> Love in earth and heaven reigns ;
> Only if child with child embrace,
> The curse can pass from Durrell's race.

It is hard to say why, but it was only in the quietude of the Friday evening,—the last evening that, for many a long day, he spent at Stafferton—that Vincent could summon up courage to open the letter which he had carried about with him since the previous Saturday night. In the deep bay window of the library, which looked out across the terrace and towards the woods, he sat down with a lamp by him, when his work was done in the silent house, and broke the seal. The letter was short. It was from his father to his grandfather. It expressed regret that he had caused him anxiety, and deeper regret that he had not been allowed

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to see him to express his sorrow by word of mouth, and a hope that yet they might meet, a hope which in this world was never destined to be fulfilled. It went on to inform the old man that the writer had been married, it asked his forgiveness for not having told this sooner, but accounted for such silence by the difficulty he had felt in approaching his father after he had been so long disowned by him. It informed his father—and Will started with astonishment as he read it—that the marriage had taken place in Gubbio, in Italy.

The beginning words of the letter were somewhat stiff, but towards the end the writer spoke more warmly, when he spoke of his wife. "She is as good as she is beautiful," he wrote, "and she comes of a race which, though not English, is not unworthy to mate with the Durrells." It expressed a hope that one day his father would see her, and then it went on, "We have one boy, born of this marriage, and as, my dear father,"—he had called him "Sir" in the earlier part of the letter—"the boy will, humanly speaking, be your heir, I trust that if I cannot persuade you to recognize me, you will at least receive him. May I," it added, "crave your forgiveness for anything in my conduct of which you have disapproved, and beseech you, if you

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cannot bring yourself to see me, at least to answer this letter at the earliest possible moment; I obey you by returning immediately to Italy, and my address will be as before, in Perugia." The letter was signed, "With respect and affection, your dutiful and regretful son, William Durrell."

There were many and conflicting emotions in Vincent's mind as he finished the letter. It was sad to him to know that that letter had never met his grandfather's eye; strange to him to realize that it had been written by his poor father, in that very library; and there was something awful in the thought that the curse on sin seemed so to follow his family that his grandfather's sudden death had hindered him from knowing the *amende* which his son had tried to make to him; and that that letter, upon which so much depended, had been swept up among a heap of apparently useless papers, by some careless hand, and thrown aside, in the unopened cupboard, for so many years. But the joy in the young man's heart was not to be spoken when he now knew for certain that all was right about his father's marriage. He felt a sense of possession in the old place, which gave him greater joy, not for his own sake, but for May's.

"I am a sham 'Child,'" she had

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said to him; he was himself, indeed, the "Child of Stafferton," and the old prophetic distich that he had read came back to him, with a sense of consolation,—

> "Only if child with child embrace,
> The curse can pass from Durrell's race."

How extraordinary also it seemed—he sat and thought—that the doctor should have hunted all Italy for proofs of his parents' marriage, and that after all it had taken place in that very Gubbio, where was his uncle's home, and where he had passed so many years of his happy childhood!

As he raised his eyes from the letter, and looked down the library—now dim in the shades of gathering night—he fancied for an instant that again he saw the vision of the child standing with uplifted arms, as if beseeching, by the tower door. If he did see it, it was gone in an instant. For a moment a thought came to him to go through the door, and up the stairs of that haunted tower, and see what was to be seen, but again he thought his imagination was getting the better of him. The house was very silent, a creepy, uncomfortable feeling was coming over him, and he determined to go home at once.

Will Vincent left Stafferton on the Saturday morning. His uncle—for we must still call the doctor his uncle—had entrusted him with legal business which

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had to be done in London before he left England. The doctor was to follow him to London, in a week or ten days, and then it was intended that they should go to Italy together.

That mysterious thing "business," especially when English law is concerned, is apt to move on slow and creaking wheels. One way and another the departure for Italy had to be deferred, and, as a matter of fact, he did not leave the country until close upon the end of January, and, when he did leave, Dr. Pendrell was obliged to remain, for a time, behind him.

For some reason or another Will kept the secret of the letter entirely to himself. He desired to make nothing known until he held positive proof of everything, and he cared the less for the delay because now so secure as to the issue. All that he did do was to assure the doctor that he had found proof which satisfied his own mind, and to tell Lady Dorothy that he had reason to believe in the certainty of success. Lady Dorothy wrote to him, from time to time, while he remained in London; told him of the efforts that were being made by Sir Hugh to bring about speedily the marriage he desired, but assured him May was perfectly happy, kind to the colonel, firm though affectionate with her father, and—what he did not need to be

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told—unwavering in her faithfulness to himself.

At last his business was completed; his heavier luggage, with all that was valuable, including the precious letter, was sent direct to the house of the Marchesa di Spoleto in Rome; and he himself started, by the way of Folkestone and Boulogne, to Marseilles.

It was a tiresome, chilly, uneventful journey, so far. He sailed in one of the small vessels touching at Genoa and Leghorn, for Civita Vecchia. The Gulf of Lyons was, as usual, rough, and the boat was small and uncomfortable. He had half a mind to leave it at Genoa, and then again at Leghorn, and proceeding by land, but he had unpacked his things and become used to his cabin, and the potent sway of *vis inertiæ*, which, alas! determines so many of our actions in life, determined him to continue on board, to the end of the journey.

The boat left Leghorn on a stormy evening, the sea was running high with that suddenness and ferocity so common in the treacherous Mediterranean, great banks of inky clouds stretched up from the Western horizon, and, what was more disagreeable, a creeping, chilly fog, as bad as in the English Channel, surrounded the vessel in a way to remind one

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—so Will thought as he staggered up and down the slippery deck—of a clinging shroud of death. He turned in early, for everything on deck was clammy and uncomfortable, and there was no cabin passenger on board but himself. Through the night, from time to time, he was disturbed by the weird, monotonous screeching of the fog-horn. At last he woke outright, and thought it must be nearing morning, and that Civita Vecchia could not be far ahead. They had passed Elba, and he believed that they were steaming under the lee of Giglio, for the sea, though fierce and angry, was certainly not so rough as before. He put on some clothes, put his feet in his slippers, wrapped a warm coat about him, and was just preparing to go on deck, when suddenly there was a cry, followed immediately by a crash, so violent that he was flung on his back on the cabin floor.

He sprang to his feet and rushed on deck. The fog was thick, but there was light enough to discern, for'ard on the port beam, what looked like a great black monster looming terrible through the mist. It was only for a moment, for the monster seemed to withdraw and sweep away into the darkness. With a feeling of horror, Will saw at once what had happened. They were in collision, and

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the colliding vessel had not stood by them. He rushed for'ard, but everything there was in confusion, shouts and counter-shouts, curses and yells were all that he could hear, some men were tugging vainly at a boat, and the captain's voice could scarcely be heard, and not a word he said clearly distinguished above the din.

Will felt that he was already wading in water, and now he became aware that the ill-fated vessel had been almost cleft asunder at the port beam, and that the angry sea must be pouring in its tons of water. It could not be many minutes, so he knew, before she settled down. The sea was already running hard over her bulwarks; men could only be distinguished as shadows, in the thickness of the fog. It was a literal case of *sauve qui peut;* he turned quickly back to the empty after-deck, and ran against the solitary figure of the cabin steward, struggling up, half asleep, in shirt and trousers.

Will had noticed, the evening before, some life-belts hung under the bulwarks of the after-deck.

"Back with you!" he said in Italian to the steward "There is nothing for it but a life-belt."

"Oh! Iddio mio! Oh! madre del cielo!" began the miserable man.

"Stop your screaming, and put that belt

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on!" shouted Will, as he threw a belt to his companion, and, flinging off the coat which he had wrapped about him, he fastened another on himself.

He was deft and quick enough to know the secret which makes a life-belt ruin or salvation, and more quickly than it is possible to describe, he had secured it so to his neck and shoulders, that it could not slip and become a means of drowning him. He saw his companion fumbling at his, and wasting his energy in groaning and shouting; in an instant he had helped him to adjust it properly; in another instant they were both on the poop, behind the wheel. The man at the wheel was gone. Will imagined that he saw, and hoped that he saw, that a boat had been safely lowered, but there were not many seconds for speculation. In another minute the wretched vessel had put her nose into the waters, and plunged head foremost to destruction; and in yet another he found himself battling with angry waves, in a thick fog and a chilling wind.

Will was a good swimmer, but what swimmer can stand against a sea under such conditions? How long it was he could not tell, but soon he felt that he was being chilled to the bone, and that his strength and senses were going.

The human mind is often preter-

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naturally alert, of this we have many evidences, in moments of excessive danger.

In one sudden sweep Will's life in its minutest detail of history seemed to flash with the vividness and swiftness of lightning through his brain. But three thoughts were more vivid than others, his love for May, his love for the man who had been father and mother to him for so long, and a humble, penitent sense that he was coming very near the presence of his God.

"God protect her!" he prayed, "God guard and bless and comfort him! God have mercy upon me, a sinner! Out of the deep have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!"

A huge billow struck him and rolled over him, and he knew no more.

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CHAPTER XIV.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

THINGS at Heath Cross were not altogether pleasant in those closing days of January. Colonel Marston had been there almost constantly, and whilst Lady May could not but feel that there was about him much that was kind and even attractive, somehow he was rousing all the opposition in her nature by a sort of assumption of a special relationship towards her, of which he had never yet spoken, and which she certainly never encouraged. Sir Hugh too had a way of speaking of the Colonel, as though he and May were already engaged, until at last the situation became to May almost unbearable.

The absence of Vincent, the impossibility of hearing anything of him or from him, the entire wrench away from the old life at Stafferton, and this quietly assumed settlement of things for her future, were straining to the utmost her sense of filial respect for Sir Hugh, and indeed in any girl of a less strong and less simple character would have led to

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petulance and irritation. With May it only produced an increasing sadness, the roses were fading from her cheeks, she was beginning to look thinner and more delicate, she looked strangely older, the girl had passed into the woman; she lost her former cheeriness, she cared less for riding, and more for wandering alone in the woods; and at last Lady Mannerton noticed the change, and became seriously alarmed.

May had been wandering alone, with no companion but old Cæsar and little Judy, one gusty afternoon this January, and came in, more languid and more pale than ever, to fling herself wearily on the sofa in her mother's sitting-room, about the time of afternoon tea.

"May, my darling," said Lady Mannerton, going up to her kindly, "what is wrong? You are not the least like yourself. Can I do anything to cheer you?"

May started up, her habitual determination coming to her aid. "Mother dear," she said, "I am ashamed of myself; you can do one thing, if you don't mind; will you ask Lady Dorothy Masham to come and stay with us for a little? I know that she is at Ravensthorpe, and she is alone."

Lady Mannerton stooped down and kissed her, and went straight to her writing-table. "My dear Dorothy," she wrote, "come to us if you can. We are quite alone, except for the perennial

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Colonel. May is not well, and you will do her more good than any one, at least any one who is within reach. Your affectionate, M. M."

The following morning there was a telegram from Lady Dorothy, and the following evening she was at Heath Cross.

"This is too dear of you, Lady Dorothy," said May, as her kind friend walked into her sitting-room, about half an hour before dinner, "you always come like sunshine, and the clouds are over me thick at present, and I can't tell why."

It was true what she said, Lady Dorothy came as good strong sunlight. The dinner-table at Heath Cross was a very different thing that evening. Sir Hugh was less sententious than usual, for Lady Dorothy had a trick of contradicting him flatly, and yet keeping him somehow in constant good-humour; and she drew out Colonel Marston so that all that was in him most agreeable—and this was much—was placed at the public service. When the ladies left the dining-room, Lady Dorothy told Lady Mannerton that she wanted May to herself for a little, and she carried her off to her own room.

Lying on the hearth-rug, with her head on Lady Dorothy's knee, and her hand locked in that of her friend, May told her that she could not get rid of a sense of impending danger, and that that night

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it was becoming close and unbearable.

"Dear Lady Dorothy," she said, "I am sure there is something dreadful happening to him; I am sure there is something wrong to-night, and I can't shake it off. I spent an hour in chapel this evening, praying about it all, and no light and no relief has come."

"Out of darkness He bringeth light," said Lady Dorothy solemnly. "'He shall not be *afraid* of any evil tidings, for his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord.'"

Like all bright and natural people, Lady Dorothy's seriousness had a depth of reality in it, which had penetrating power.

"I know, I know," said Lady May, and then she burst into tears. Her companion allowed her to cry her heart out, for it was just what she felt to be best for her, and the truest sympathy is often shown in letting natural grief have its way, and find its relief in an outburst of sorrow. She caressed her, and kissed her, and May felt the strong support of a strong heart that knows, and sympathizes, and is silent; and at last, when she had cried to her heart's content, "You will go to bed now, my little one," she said, "and say your prayers with trust and confidence, and I will come and see you by-and-by."

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"No," said May, springing to her feet, "I must go downstairs."

"That you shan't, my dear; I shall put it all right there," and she kissed her again, and was gone.

Lady Dorothy had a long discussion with Colonel Marston on Army Reform, and she badgered Sir Hugh unmercifully, on the scandalous manner in which he was neglecting to thin the plantations at Heath Cross, and so destroying the woods of the future. She mentioned incidentally that May had a headache, and that she had insisted on her going to bed. Sir Hugh, for a moment, showed signs of sending for a doctor, and ordering medicines, and generally making a fuss, and Lady Mannerton smiled inwardly at the peremptoriness with which Lady Dorothy put him down. It was only occasionally that she attempted that herself, for usually she acquiesced, in a languid manner, but she rejoiced to see it done by some one else, and no one dared to contradict Lady Dorothy when she definitely made up her mind.

Life, in those days, was less unhappy for May, but that night had made its mark upon her; perhaps the mark would have been more sudden and incisive, if she could have known how true her instincts were, and could have seen Will,

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in the chilling wind and thickening fog, struggling for life with the waves.

It was an unhappy thing, for all concerned, that young Lord Ravensthorpe was out of health at the time, and had been ordered to Malaga, and that ten days later, Lady Dorothy was obliged to leave England, and accompany him to Spain.

Will Vincent had some strange glimpses of semi-consciousness. In after times they came back upon him, like bad dreams. Again and again such glimpses returned, in a weird mysterious light, and he fancied that he had remembered living people about him, and efforts made to tend him and give him food; but the first clear glimpse of consciousness that came to him brought a scene which he could not understand.

He thought he saw a rough, strange room, and opposite him, on the floor, leaning forward on a staff, a kind of sylvan Pan. It was the figure of a man, dressed in goat-skins, with a high-peaked hat adorned with many-coloured tassels, a dark face, black eyes, and shaggy beard, but a kindly look. Over him, he was sure, there was bending a woman, and he fancied afterwards that he had heard one say to the other, "Per Bacco, he will come right yet." It seemed all a dream, and he sank again into unconsciousness, and then he

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felt sure that he had seen the face of an old priest, and that he was kneeling beside him, and half heard some snatches of Latin prayers, and caught the image of a crucifix.

"He is noble, I am certain," he heard a voice say, and then he saw clearly the same figure of an Abruzzi goatherd, such as he remembered in his childhood, and the figure of a woman, an Italian contadina, and the figure of a priest.

"Where am I?" he said, "what is it?" naturally in Italian.

"You are safe, my son," the priest answered; "thanks to Our Lady and the saints, you will recover, but you are weak, you must keep quiet;" and Will fell into a profound sleep.

Then for days and days there was little else but sleep and languor, and passing visions, as before, and when at last he had sufficiently recovered the foothold of his consciousness, he found himself in a mere cabin in the North-Western Campagna, and the sun that streamed through the windows was the sun of the early days of May.

Gradually very gradually—for his weakness was terrible, and the sustenance given him was rough and scanty—he came back to the full memory of the past. The story of his miraculous safety was told him by degrees. The waves that had brought him

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unconsciousness had tossed him on the Italian shore; he had been saved by the lonely goatherd, who found his winter shelter in the cabin where he lay, and he had been nursed, as best they could nurse him, by the contadino and his wife, through long, long weeks of fever and delirium. There was no clue to be found about him to tell from whence he came; the country was in a disturbed state, for one of the many Italian revolutions was approaching; Rome was too far away for these poor people to communicate with the authorities; there was nothing for it but to leave things as they were. The simple couple had fancied in him a likeness to a son they had lost, and the old priest, who occasionally came down from the distant uplands to minister to the wants of the wandering goatherds, had helped them to administer for his physical wants, such cordials as they and the good father could supply. Their kindly attendance, and Will's strong constitution, had pulled him through a raging fever, and weeks of half-conscious lassitude, not relieved by the malarious air of the low-lying Campagna shore.

Still some weeks elapsed before he could sit up, on the miserable bed, and think of making arrangements for the future. The good *padre* for still a week or two was absent, and when he did return, and when

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Will succeeded at last, by his assistance, in having a letter written, to apprise his uncle of his condition, the frightful heats of June had already warned off most of the goatherds to their mountains, and it was evident that if the invalid was ever to recover his strength, he must be removed. His uncle had been directed in the letter to send him money, to the Hôtel d'Angleterre, in the Via Bocca di Leone, in Rome; and Will, arrayed in such garments as could be furnished him by his kind preservers, was taken by them at last a slow and weary journey thither.

The heat was almost insufferable, but the journey at last was accomplished; he explained matters to the hotel-keeper, and thankfully took to his bed. He bade good-bye, with expressions of endless gratitude, to the good Antonio Squalci and his wife Flavia, and the simple people had no difficulty in trusting him, when he promised some day to visit them at Aquila, and meantime to send them on the earliest opportunity some fitting remuneration, as an acknowledgment of their services. He sent to her Palazzo, to inquire for the Marchesa di Spoleto, but found that she had left Rome a month before for her mountain residence near Anagui.

There was nothing for it but to wait for his uncle's answer, and under the care of

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an English doctor—for whom he had sent, to get well as best he could in the heats of the Bocca di Leone.

Rome has an attractiveness of its own at all times, and though visitors usually flee from it at such a season, to those who know how to avoid the heat and to utilize its abundant wealth of shadow, a Roman summer has its attractions too. Hope is a great power for recovery. Will was young, and had a fine constitution, and in spite of the shock of his shipwreck, and relapse after relapse in malarious fever, under the care of his excellent English physician he was soon able to walk out, when the worst heat of the day was over, and even at last to sit under such shade as he could find on the Pincian when the evening was falling, and enjoy that incomparable view of the eternal city which the Pincian commands.

He had written himself again to his uncle, both to Stafferton and to his address in London, and he had written to Lady Dorothy Masham, to Ravensthorpe, but no answer came. They could not well come, for the doctor was in Brittany alone, broken-hearted and miserable, and Lady Dorothy, with Lord Ravensthorpe, after a spring in Spain, was moving about in Switzerland. It was impossible for Will to stir, partly from want of strength,

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and partly from want of money. This last necessity could have been supplied by his doctor, but he dissuaded Will from any intention of moving, as, hot as Rome was, he considered a journey for him, alone, was scarcely as yet advisable.

At last Will could bear it no longer, he succeeded in rescuing his luggage, which he found had not been recalled to England, borrowed money from his doctor, and started at once—writing first again to his uncle—to pursue his quest at Gubbio.

It was a glorious evening in July when he reached the old city, which had so long been his home; the caretaker at his uncle's villa at once accepted his identity, and received him as her master.

Sitting under the pergola that evening, drinking in health from the mountain breezes, and looking over the magnificent prospect, the Past seemed to him like a dreadful dream.

The chasm that had been cleft in his life made him feel as a man might feel who had risen from the dead. In proportion to his physical weakness was the power of his imagination and spiritual perception; he had always been sincerely religious, butnow things fell into different and, he thought, truer perspective.

To follow the Divine Light wherever it streamed into the soul, seemed now to him everything. What was the world? what

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were ambitions? what were schemes and pleasures, since life was held upon such a slender tenure, and Eternity seemed everything, and Time of scarcely any value at all?

And yet there was a joy in living, and enjoying that fair landscape, and breathing those fresh breezes, and believing, as he had never believed before, that he had a work given him to do; and May's question came back upon him, "What is the use of life?" and then May's answer, filled with the force of a soul that had almost touched eternity, "To be like Christ, and, by His aid, to be unselfish, and to help other people." "And I will do it," Will said to himself; "By Thy help Who hast saved me." And his words were spoken with the force of a solemn vow. And May's love came back to him with redoubled vigour, but it seemed now an ideal love, pervading all his life and work, as the actual representative of it seemed separated from him by a chasm deep as the grave.

He rose up and strolled into the town, there were the usual sights and sounds around him, of an Italian evening; groups of contadini were standing or sitting together, chatting and laughing, or playing at "Mora;" little children were at their games; *pifferari* were playing their pipes; dark-browed, dark-eyed matrons and maidens were marching with water

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pitchers upon their heads; all had the life and brightness of a mountain evening in Italy.

He wandered down into the Piazza in the lower town, and stood to look back on the rugged mountain that overtops it, and the old pile of the ducal palace, and the line of grim cypresses beyond,—then he noticed a stream of people going into the church of San Francesco, and he followed them.

There was the *Benediction* just beginning. He longed for prayer, longed for the old evening service at Stafferton, and with that longing he went in. He knew the service well, and he knelt with the country people and joined reverently in the prayers. It soothed him, and he rejoiced to think that the hands of the Crucified were spread above him in blessing, now that he was beginning a new life. When the service was over a thought struck him, and he followed the priest into the sacristy; he told him that he desired to verify the registry of a marriage which perhaps, so he said, had taken place in that church, and he told the names and mentioned the year.

The priest was courteous; there was some calling for keys and looking for registers, the year was turned to, and there it was. Will had felt certain that he should find it, but he was astonished at the rapidity of his success; perhaps he

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was still more astonished at the absence of anything like elation in his own mind at possessing the precious document which he had longed for so long. A copy was duly made out and witnessed. He paid the necessary fees, and returned, tired out, to the villa.

The very next day a letter reached him from his uncle, which had just missed him in Rome. It was short, it expressed unspeakable thankfulness at his safety; the loss of the ship had long been known, and they had believed him to be dead. It added that great delay had occurred in the receipt of his letters, and that he was at once starting for Italy.

Will could not account for the settled sadness that, in spite of all this, was creeping over him. He tried to attribute it to his weakness, but anyhow there it was. Some mysterious power within him told him vaguely what Dr. Pendrell alone could tell him with exactness.

There had been a great change. As a matter of fact, three days after the *padre's* first letter had reached his uncle's address in London, and many days before that and his own letters had tracked him out in his wanderings in Brittany, Lady May Roseby —with no heart to give to any one—had been married to Colonel Marston in the parish church at Heath Cross.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE THUNDERBOLT FALLS.

WHATEVER sad thoughts clouded the mind of Vincent that night had vanished in the morning. It was a glorious morning, and the fresh breeze of the mountains was already bringing him back health, and the wide landscape, in the bright early hours, delighting his artist's eye. Matters now, too, seemed clear before him; by an extraordinary stroke of lucky chance, he had secured the precious document upon which all depended; he was soon to see his uncle, he would soon hear of Lady May, and, though he was bound in honour not to write to her, he would soon find means to relieve what he felt must be her grave anxieties, nay, heart-breaking sorrows. Here in the bright July morning, health and life, and love, seemed coming back to him, and he longed impatiently for "the pater's" arrival.

On his breakfast-table, which was spread for him under the *loggia*, he found a letter from the Marchesa di Spoleto. It was a pretty letter, expressing satisfaction at his safety, regret that she had not known, until a day or two before from the English doctor,

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of his arrival in Rome, and an urgent invitation to join her, until his uncle's arrival, which, she rightly took for granted, would be soon, at the Villa Spoleto.

"I have left my grim tower at Anagni," she wrote, "the place is too *triste*, even in July, and I am here at my villa, with my sister-in-law, a dear dull thing, but so good. Come and cheer us up; I know, like your father, you love to watch the lights and shadows from the Alban Hills."

Will was impatient to be doing something, he felt more like himself, and he was sick of his loneliness, and in another hour he was driving, slowly enough, in a rickety vettura towards the Furlo pass for Urbino. He had time to meditate, for although his driver assured him that Leone and Carlo—his two steeds—were noble creatures, they seemed to him more like to die than to run away, and his pity was touched by the raws on their shoulders, which the extraordinary insensibility of the Latin nations to the sufferings of their creatures, never seems to take any account of. It was a good twelve hours' drive to Urbino, but he was artist enough to enjoy the glories of the *Furlo*, and he amused himself remembering how he had described that pass to Lady May, in the early days of their acquaintance, at Stafferton.

Love is life, and a bringer of life, and, in

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spite of the tedious journey, Will was feeling stronger and happier every hour; he enjoyed his night at Urbino; the old place seemed grander than ever; the palace seemed to tell in more stately language of its bygone glories; the inhabitants, whose beauty he had never forgotten, seemed more beautiful than before; he attended another *benediction* in the church of Sant' Andrea, and thought how strong the Roman Church was on her *devotional* side, if only she would be a little more "straight" on her *doctrinal;* he peopled the place again with the great artists who surrounded the throne of *Federigo;* the artist power within him was reviving, and he thought that in *that* he would do something great, and find a use in life, under the inspiration of May's love, and he pictured to himself the delight of showing her the glories of his Italian mountains, now that so soon he could claim her—no man surely gainsaying him—as his own.

The following night he was in Rome, and the afternoon after, leaving a note in the Bocca di Leone, for his uncle, who had not yet arrived, he took the afternoon train for Frascati, hired a carriage for Grotta Ferata, and then determined to walk on to the Villa Spoleto, which lay on the slopes of the Alban Hills, between that place and

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Marino. He was tempted off his route a little, down the deep valley which leads to the Parco Colonna, and sat dreaming for half an hour, looking at the mountains by the lake side, where the old hero who had insulted Roman majesty in the days of the Roman kingdom, died, so Livy tells us, such a tragic and ignominious death.

It was quite late in the afternoon when he came in sight of the Villa Spoleto, and he could not help turning once again at the gate to gaze at the evening lights and shadows across the Campagna. It was indeed a glorious view. The softest shades of azure were sleeping in the hollows, the long circles of mountains were basking dreamily in an ever-deepening gold; the lines of broken aqueducts were drinking in the dying sunlight, as a young heart drinks in the finest intoxicating powers of love and happiness, before it falls beneath the shrouds of death; the great dome of St. Peter's rose high above that undulating sea of shadow and of colour, and the great cross which crowns it took daringly a blaze of brilliance from the flaming west as if to say that even when night is gathering the Christian Religion secures the strongest sunshine for a darkening world. "There is no place like my Italy," he said, with all an artist's enthusiasm, "and how *she* will love it!" he whispered to himself, with all a lover's joy.

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As Will turned to the villa he walked with a firmer step; he could not help feeling that he could meet his father's old friend with a satisfied certainty that he had a right to claim his father's name. He was shown at once into the pretty drawing-room, from the windows of which there was the same glorious view of the Roman Campagna. He felt at once that the room had about it all the grace of Italy, and the comforting sense of "home," of England.

Pictures and statues and bronzes and antiques spoke of Italy, and the cosy chairs and couches, and the sweet smell of violets, and the vases filled with well-ordered flowers, spoke of the cultured carefulness of an English hand.

The Marchesa was in the room in a moment. She was still a young woman, and she looked much younger than she was. It was a fresh, childlike face; the mouth was firm but laughing, and when the red lips opened they showed a row of teeth of incomparable whiteness, with just that touch of delicate bluish shade that shows the whiteness to perfection. Her eyes were large and of the softest hazel, and her hair, of which immense masses crowned her head, was of dark chestnut. The forehead was low and broad—or it looked low, for the hair fell over it—and the complexion was like the finest ivory. In spite of her six-and-thirty years—for Will knew she must at least be

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of that age—she scarcely seemed seven-and-twenty; she was dressed in a light soft summer gown, which seemed to ripple loosely round her form. She looked no way Italian, except for a pretty grace of movement which showed itself at once. Will just remembered having seen her long ago, but he was not old enough then to understand how beautiful she was, and for an instant he gazed with unabashed astonishment and admiration upon such a fair summer vision as she entered the pretty room.

There are some people who put you at your ease at once, and whom you cannot choose but like, and the Marchesa di Spoleto was one of them. Ill-natured women in Roman society sometimes whispered that the young widow was a flirt, but they had to *whisper* it, for in their hearts they knew it was a falsehood. She had that peculiar gift—a combination of goodness and beauty and kindliness, and the wisdom of a childlike heart—which enabled her to do anything she pleased, anything with all men, and anything with most women, which is impossible to all except to such rarely gifted mortals. No one that knew her could choose but love her, and in the ten years of her wealthy widowhood, and in her wide knowledge of life both in London and in the exclusive and gossiping society of Rome, no man had ever dared to go a step too far with

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her, and no shadow of scandal had ever clouded her name.

The Marchesa came to meet Will with both her hands out.

"Dear Mr. Vincent," she said, in English, with a pretty foreign accent, "this is too nice of you to come so quickly; you are quite a hero of romance, we have thought you dead for months and months, and here you are alive to rejoice us all. I have had a note from your uncle, your father I think you call him, he will be in Rome to-morrow morning, and I have written to tell him to come on here at once. Dear me, how ridiculously like your own father you are! My poor Spoleto used to say he was the handsomest man in the whole world; but Spoleto would have changed his mind if he had only seen you, Mr. Vincent, you are so extraordinarily good-looking."

Will blushed and laughed.

"I say whatever I like," ran on the Marchesa. "Padre Falbi—that's my good parish priest—tells us we should speak the truth, although"—and then she lowered her voice in a comical way—"my friends in England think we Roman Catholics tell nothing but *menzogne*. And have you heard from *her?* And when is it all to happen? And is it all coming right? Of course your father—the doctor I mean—and that good solid soul, Lady Dorothy, have told me all about it, so we can dispense with

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the preface and the preliminary chapters, and prepare for the crisis together. Oh, dear, how nice it is to be in love! I was terribly in love with poor San Georgio, and then Spoleto came—poor Spoleto—and they wouldn't let me marry as I wished, and I cried nearly a whole night about it; but it all came right in the end, and San Georgio married that ugly Russian, and Spoleto was very kind, poor fellow, I hope he rests in peace! I always remember his soul at mass, and Padre Falbi says it was providential, but I wish he hadn't left me that tiresome property at Anagni, it worries me so arranging about those rents, and those vignas, and all that sort of business. You see, as I know of all your affairs, I may as well tell you of mine."

The Marchesa put on a countenance of such simple solemnity, like a child who had missed a toy, as she spoke of her lost love and her dead husband, and her business troubles, that Will burst into a perfect shout of laughter, for which he apologized immediately.

"Oh, never mind," she said; "the English think I am a little mad when I talk in this way, but then they are severely solemn, and you are Italian, aren't you, Mr. Vincent? at least your mother was, and she was so pretty. Do tell me about that sweet little May, who was like a little angel when I saw her last

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at Chesham Place, but that is seven years ago or more."

Will felt quite at home now, and then they had tea together, and then, before the Contessa di Forba—the sister-in-law—appeared, he had time to explain to the Marchesa the whole state of things, and the discovery he had made at Gubbio.

The Marchesa clapped her hands and laughed. "It was so silly of your father to make such a mystery about it. Of course I always knew my sweet Maria was legally married to him. And now I shall call you Sir William Durrell, Bart., shan't I?"

"No, no, not so fast, please," said Will; "you are committing poor Sir Hugh to a premature grave. Pray call me Mr. Vincent," he added very seriously, "until I tell you to change my name."

"Well, here comes Beatrice," as the Contessa entered the room, "and she is so very proper we must not talk like this before her. Never mind, we shall walk on the terrace this evening, while she sits there wrapt in her cloak, she *is* so afraid of malaria, as if it could come up these hills!"

They did walk on the terrace that evening, and Will discoursed freely, as a man rarely discourses to a man,—as he certainly would not have discoursed to any man except one—but as he does to a woman if she sympathizes with him, on his love for May and his hopes for a

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happy future, and when he sank to sleep that night he was filled with one of those reserves of sunlight which pitiful fate sometimes leaves us, to save us from desperation, when she is about to break upon us in one of her darkest storms.

A note reached the Marchesa the following morning, from Dr. Pendrell, the doctor, and certainly it seemed strange to Will that there was no note for him. He thought it curiously unlike "the pater." He was in Rome, would come by train to Frascati in the afternoon, and drive to the Villa. She sent a carriage to meet him, and Vincent and she dawdled away the day together, in one way or another, until the carriage returned.

In proportion as Englishmen feel deeply they often at first show it the least. This, however, had never been the way between Will and his "father." They had always been too much to one another for that. And yet now, there was a painful reserve about the doctor. They met as if they had only parted yesterday. Dr. Pendrell looked ill and nervous, and Will saw that something was wrong. He went up to his uncle's room, while the latter was dressing for dinner, and then for the first time asked him how he had left all at Stafferton.

"Lady May is well," said the doctor nervously, "but many changes have taken place since you left England.

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She has had one great sorrow, Sir Hugh Durrell is dead."

"Sir Hugh dead!" said Will; "when did that happen?"

"He was not well before you left England, my boy, and he has been failing gradually ever since, but he only died on the last day of June."

Will longed to ask many more questions, for he knew that there was much involved in such intelligence, but his uncle had remarked that they must go down to dinner, and he did not like to trouble him unnecessarily, attributing his nervousness and reticence to sorrow for the loss of his old friend. That evening his uncle insisted upon hearing a detailed narrative of all his adventures, and when bed-time came, instead of accompanying his nephew upstairs, as Will had hoped and expected, Dr. Pendrell turned to the Marchesa and said, "Lucia, may I have a few minutes' conversation with you, alone?"

When Vincent left the room, the doctor walked uneasily to the window, and stood gazing out into the bright moonlight, and the Marchesa sank down into an easy chair almost immediately behind him.

"You are in great trouble, my friend, I know you are. Can I help you?"

"I am in great trouble, Lucia," he answered, turning round and looking down upon her; "you are a very old and a very

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dear friend; you were little more than a child at the time, but you knew William Durrell and his wife, for now we *know*, all too late, that she was his lawful wife; you would help me, I know, about their son. I am in terrible trouble about my boy."

"Why, what is wrong?" said the Marchesa, now sitting bolt upright in her chair, and looking thoroughly scared, "he is the handsomest and most delightful man I ever met, and, now that this tiresome old baronet is dead, it's all clear, and he is heir to the whole thing, isn't he?"

"Handsome! Delightful!" said the doctor impatiently. "It's not all clear. I am very unhappy for my lad's sake. I thought it would have killed me when I heard he was dead; it nearly did; but this is worse, this is worse, it may kill him. I tell you, Marchesa, May Roseby is married."

The Marchesa threw herself back in her chair and covered her face with her hands. "*Oh, Madonna mia!*" she cried, "Married! This is terrible!" The Marchesa, like most of us, had two sides to her character, only, with most of us, one side is generally concealed with care, with her everything was in sunlight. She was in many ways a child, and sometimes even childish; but she had a good heart and strong principles, and that best gift of purified Celtic natures, a deep and ready sympathy.

The tears welled up to her eyes, and she

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was in real trouble. "*Povero mondo!*" she said, "*Povera gente!* Everything is upside down, my dear friend," and she stretched out her hand to the doctor.

"You have always been a wise little woman," he said, "and then you are a woman," and he stroked her hand gently as he spoke; "will you tell my poor boy this terrible news? I am a coward, a great coward, I cannot do it. I love that boy as my own soul; the shock of his supposed death has unnerved me. I cannot face his suffering; I am a great coward, I cannot do it," and the old man's voice was choked with hidden tears.

"It is very hard," she said thoughtfully, looking up at him with eyes half dim with real sorrow, "but I will try."

And so they parted for the night.

The next morning the doctor avoided Vincent, complaining of a bad headache and remaining in his room, to Will's great astonishment; and late in the afternoon, when the worst heats of the day were over, the Marchesa insisted on driving with Will to the Parco Colonna. She kept the conversation going as well as she could, talking of the scenery, and remarking, as they passed through Marino, Vincent thought with unusual gravity, and a quite unexpected historical interest, on the mediæval struggles between the Orsini and Colonna. He noticed, too, that when

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he referred with anxiety to the doctor's apparent ill-health and low spirits, she at once turned the subject.

They left the carriage in the Parco, and walked, under the shade of the beautiful woods, to the pool of the Ferentine springs. There was a great mass of lichen-covered rock just by the pool which, a few days before, Vincent had visited alone, and where Turnus Herdonius —as he had then remembered—was said to have met with his death. The Marchesa was very silent now, and Vincent, whose happy thoughts were all the brighter for the beauty of the place, was chatting easily about the broken statue which stood by the springs, when the Marchesa stopped him.

"Amico mio," she said, "I have something serious to say to you," and he turned sharp round and looked at her, struck at once by her evident earnestness.

"If you are your father's son," said the Marchesa gravely, "you are a brave man, and you need all your courage. A great misfortune has befallen you."

"Is it May?" said Will, looking steadily at her, "tell me the truth."

The Marchesa dropped her eyes, and fidgetted with the point of her parasol in the grass. "It is May," she answered.

"She is not dead?" said Vincent hoarsely, and seizing her hand almost with fierceness; "say she is not dead."

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"She is not dead, dear friend," quietly and firmly answered the Marchesa, "but she is dead to you."

"Married?" said Will, with a gasp.

"Yes, married."

"Good God!" said Vincent, and he sprang to his feet.

The Marchesa looked up at him, he was deadly pale, his very lips were white, and he leant against the rock, so that involuntarily she sprang up, fearing that he would faint.

Will half smiled as he took her hand, and made her sit down again and sat down quietly beside her.

"Don't be frightened," he said, "I am all right. Tell me all about it. My poor May!"

And the Marchesa did tell him all about it, as well as she could, with a now trembling voice, and rising tears. It was shortly told; they had all believed him dead; Sir Hugh's health was failing; and as he knew that his end was approaching, he had a great desire that Lady May should have a protector before he died. Lady May had been strongly opposed to the marriage, and especially to its being so hastened, for her heart was broken at her lover's supposed death. Lady Mannerton had opposed the marriage with more energy than usual, but at last had been led by her husband to think that, under the circumstances, it was the best thing. Lady Dorothy, on hearing of the matter in Switzerland,

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had written to Sir Hugh almost fiercely on the subject; "But she wasn't there, you know," the Marchesa said sadly, "or they couldn't have done it. No one ever dare resist Dorothy Masham, if she is with them, and Lady May seemed on the whole to care very little what might happen to her, and she felt it a duty to satisfy her dying father." On one thing only she had insisted, that Colonel Marston should not be told one word of the affair with Vincent except by herself, and then she had simply informed him that she was willing to fall in with her father's wishes, and to become his wife, if he was willing to accept as a wife one who would try to do her duty, but who had no heart to give him, for her heart was buried in the grave of another.

She had also stipulated that they should not be married at Stafferton, and accordingly they had been married at Heath Cross.

It had been intended that the wedding should take place on the 24th of June, but Lady May had insisted on the 26th, and, in fact, had remained at Stafferton until the afternoon of the 24th. Sir Hugh had died at Heath Cross, on the evening of June 30th, and the marriage had been extremely quiet, on account—so it was given out—of Sir Hugh's evidently approaching end. Dr. Pendrell had opposed it to the utmost, and, when he saw that opposition was fruitless, he had been silent. He had not

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been present at the ceremony, being in close attendance on the dying man, and had left England immediately after the funeral, a broken-hearted man.

When Will heard of May's resistance to the 24th of June, any one who had seen his face, as he leant his chin upon his hands, and his elbows on his knees, and gazed out before him on the pool and the valley, would have noticed a faint, sad smile light up the pallor of his countenance.

When the Marchesa had finished her recital, she made him give her one of his hands, and he felt her hot tears fall upon it.

"My dear friend," she said softly; but he only answered, looking far into the distance, and as if speaking to himself, "Just like her, she was faithful to the last, and self-sacrificing—my darling May—so will I try to be. Poor child! poor child!"

"I know now," he added after a moment, "why my father looks so ill and miserable; poor dear pater, he is suffering for me. Ah! God help me!" The sunlight seemed to have left the hills, although it still was blazing there, for a band of ice was round his heart; and we all know that

> "Places are too much,
> Or else too little for immortal man."

Life seemed to have been struck out of him, for, however kind the Marchesa's words had been, however sweet her sympathy, the thunderbolt had fallen.

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CHAPTER XVI.

FACING THE ENEMY.

AMONG the strangest of human trials is this, that however sharply a sorrow may hit us, life has to be lived under its ordinary conditions notwithstanding, and the world goes on with ruthless determination, refusing to acknowledge that everything for us is changed. You stand by a dying bed on a summer morning, when the life that is slowly ebbing away before you ought to take with it all the brightness from the sunlight and the perfume from the flowers; but in spite of the sorrows of your desolate heart, the sun persists in streaming through the window, and the rose has its old colour and perfume, and the bees are humming and the birds sing. You stand and wave your last adieux to the figure that recedes on the ship's deck more and more into distance, and as you turn back lonely, with tears in your heart if not in your eyes, you feel that the crowd should be silent, and the muffled bells should peal; but instead of that, the bells are silent, and the jostling crowd is noisy in the streets, just as if

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your heart were not beating with a wild delirium of sorrow, just as if your life were all the same as it had been before you lost the last glimpse of that loved face across the waves. "Take courage," says the cynic, "the same thing is happening a thousand times, hearts are breaking from moment to moment, life has to be endured by others as it is endured by you." But you turn, if your heart is healthy, and say,—

> "That loss is common, doth not make
> My own less bitter,—rather more—
> Too common; never morning wore
> To evening, but some heart did break."

"Take courage," whispers the gentler spirit, "never indeed let the love slacken, and the sorrow in its tender uses die; face the changed life at once bravely, as you face an enemy, and you will make it at last a friend."

When Will woke the following morning from restless sleep and troubled dreams, he had the sense of utter weariness of one who faces life weighted with a great sorrow. The first impulse was, of course, the impulse of dejection and despair. With his artist's nature, and the absence of all the home ties which make up so much of the lives of most of us, love for his "father," and then his young love for May, had become the essential parts of his being;

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but he had two powers which helped him against the wild jealousy inherited in his Italian blood, and the bitter spirit of cynicism which came, like a wicked fiend, tempting him to harden his heart and despair.

There is a saying of Bossuet's somewhere speaking of the great Condé's courage in face of the enemy, "A sa vue il s'est animé, *efferatus in eum*, dit le prophète, il l'abat, il le foule aux pieds," and Will had inherited from his Durrell ancestry indomitable courage; and, as he thought of his future, something of it rose within him, prompting him to face the cruel life which met him bravely, and to conquer it. And there was another power, he was in the strong grip of sincere religion; duty had long been duty to him, and, if trial had come, trial must be borne with trust in God. And, indeed, there was yet a further power, he loved the man who had been father and mother to him with an intensity of filial affection; for him he must live and work; and above all he loved May, loved her in the real sense of that great word, loved her devotedly; in the bitterest moment of his anguish, he was sorrowing, as only a strong man who truly loves can sorrow, not so much for himself as for her.

"My poor little darling," he said again and again to himself, "how she will suffer!" and the first thought of real relief which

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came to him was the hope that perhaps he might do something to make life less heavy for her; and the next was—and he treasured it every hour of every day—that whosesoever wife she might be, she was his first, last love, and he was hers; and as he thought of it there came into his mind,—

"'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all."

And then he went back to the thought of the doctor. "Dear old pater," he said, "how worn and broken he looks. I will care for him as he has cared for me, and try to make him well and happy."

But all the same, life on that new morning, in spite of all the Italian sunshine, was a very grey life for poor Will. It was fortunate for him that he was not alone with his uncle. They were both of them too deep in sorrow. The doctor was too much shaken, feeling too acutely for the son he loved so much, to trust himself to speak of it yet; and so in those first days of struggle, when Will was trying to face life with all the old future gone from him, the womanly sympathy and the pretty childlike tenderness of the Marchesa were quite invaluable. Dr. Pendrell did not dare to allude to the subject for many days, he looked uneasy and unhappy, and wretchedly ill, and cast furtive glances at his nephew from time to time; but he stayed much in his own room,

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and walked out much alone, while Will sat with the Marchesa sometimes for hours in silence, or strolled out with her in the evening, and delighted to listen, or not listen, to the talk which, with a true womanly tact, she knew how to carry on, on all sorts of general topics, when she felt he could not bear *the* topic which was nearest his heart.

Fully a week had passed in this way, when one morning the doctor asked to speak to him in his room. Will came and sat down quietly in a chair by the window, and his uncle, who had been uneasily pacing the room, suddenly stopped by him, and putting his hand kindly on his shoulder, said, "My boy, you do not think I am wanting in sympathy because I have not spoken; I have been trying to see my way. You have been hit hard, my boy, and I have been thinking of your future life. Where is the use of my thinking?" he added in a bitter tone; "it is all my thinking and scheming that has brought all this upon you."

"Dear father," answered Will, "you are unfair to yourself, it is a misfortune which neither of us could avoid. I have been thinking of life, too, and trying to see my way; I can't see it yet, but I shall by-and-by," he said wearily.

"Well, Will," his uncle went on, "there is one thing that must be dealt with, and that is your name and title and property.

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Your uncle, Sir Hugh, made his will many years ago, leaving everything to Lady May Roseby, in case his brother William had no child born in lawful wedlock, in which case, as he acknowledged, since the entail must interfere, he left Lady May a certain income on the part of the Heath Cross property not entailed; even had he not done so, now that your father's marriage is proved, the whole thing except that income is necessarily yours. Some steps must be taken."

Will sprang from his chair, and began walking up and down the room, and at last he turned upon his uncle.

"I owe you everything, dear father," he said, "and I have no right to depend upon you any longer; but on this I am resolved, she shall never know that I am living, if I can help it, while that man lives; and she shall never lose one foot of the Durrell property through me. I have a right to keep the name I have long been known by, if I please, and I will keep it. Give me time, father, I shall see my way presently, and earn my own bread somehow. My poor little darling!" he went on, talking more to himself than to the doctor, "she shall never be a loser by me, and have that husband of hers cursing her for allowing him to marry her under false pretences."

"You are my own noble boy," said his uncle, looking at him with undisguised admiration, "and your own father's son.

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But, Will, I am bound to say to you that it would be thought Quixotic."

"You are not bound to say it," said Will, turning on him fiercely. "Thought indeed! who cares what anybody thinks? I am sure, pater, it has never been your way to guide yourself by people's 'thoughts!' You have taught me, sir, to behave as an honourable man and a gentleman, and you will not blame me if I try to live the lessons you have taught."

"I do not blame you, Will," said the doctor sadly, and his voice trembled as he added, "I am very proud of you, my boy."

"Promise me one thing, dear father," said Will, "*you* will never let her know, and you will insist on the same from Lady Dorothy and the Marchesa."

"I promise," said the doctor. And so it was that Will set about to find some fresh start in life, now that the old hope was gone.

Far away in England, Lady May was trying in a different way to "face the enemy" in the form of a new life, from which all real hope had fled. Vincent's supposed death had been to her a stunning blow. She had made up her mind, in a wild, despairing effort, to do her duty, and to become Colonel Marston's wife. Sir Hugh's illness, followed by his death, were very real sorrows, but the great sorrow she had

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passed through made all others slight, and she set about her new life with a quiet, sad determination simply to do her duty. There is always a reward to those who try so to do.

Life was very quiet at Heath Cross. After the marriage, so soon followed by the funeral, Lady Mannerton had gone to stay with some of her own relations, wisely wishing to allow the newly married couple to settle down undisturbed. And very undisturbed their life was. Colonel Marston was a gentlemanlike man, fond of country pursuits, not more selfish than most men, with a great admiration for Lady May, with the sort of deference towards her which a very elderly man feels for a very beautiful young woman who has not disdained his hand, and which a man of very moderate means feels for his wife when he has happened to marry a great heiress.

His position in the county was immensely raised by the union of the Heath Cross property with his own, and by the fact that now he was also master of Stafferton. He had no idea that a wife could want much more from her husband than to be kindly treated, and to be allowed to do pretty much what she pleased.

Love for her, or any other woman, in its real sense, he had never known, but he was very proud of her beauty, and her

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rank and talents, proud too to have such a one at the head of his table, and as his companion in leisure hours. People talked of Sir Hugh as an old goose, for having encouraged such a match, and of Colonel Marston as a most fortunate person.

There could not at first be much company at Heath Cross, but before the middle of September, the Colonel proposed that he should have a few friends, to shoot over the moors with him at Stafferton, and Lady May made no objection.

"I think your father would have wished it," he said.

"I dare say he would," was his wife's answer, and so the matter was settled.

As a matter of fact Lady May felt rather grateful to her husband for having made no proposal about the 12th of August, for that, she felt, she scarcely could have borne from memories of the past; and so it came about that they were at Stafferton early in September.

She was quite determined to make her husband happy, in every way she could, and she made the house as pleasant for his guests as, under the circumstances, any house could have been. For herself, she set about returning the calls of friends, who came from time to time to visit her, when it was known she had returned to Stafferton. It was on one of these occasions that she received a shock, which made her

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task of facing future life more than ever difficult.

She had driven over to Capelthorpe, a pretty place across that valley which sweeps away, below the entrance gate to Stafferton Park. Sir Godfrey Siddons was the owner of Capelthorpe, and Lady Siddons was an old acquaintance, in days gone by, which were really so recent but now seemed so far away. Lady Siddons had called a week before, but Lady May had not been in the house. On the day when the call was to be returned Lady May was much alone. The gentlemen were to be on the moors all the day. Lady May had spent the morning in sketching, and in writing a long letter to Lady Dorothy Masham; the letter had been a difficult business, for she had been trying, with a true woman's pride, to convey to Lady Dorothy the impression that she was perfectly happy, and that her husband was all that any woman could desire. She had an uncomfortable, underlying sense, that while Lady Dorothy would quite understand her motive, she would not believe a word she wrote. "Dear Dorothy," she had said to herself, as she leant her elbows on the writing-table, and buried her face in her hands, "you will know all about it; you will know that I am very miserable; and I *am* very miserable. Oh, Will, Will!" and then she sat and cried. She started

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up, angry with herself, and vowed for the hundredth time that she would not permit such thoughts. "He is very good, my husband!" she said, and then she ran upstairs to dress. It was a beautiful afternoon of September, and as she rolled down the avenue in her carriage, alone, she could not but think of that last September as she passed the entrance to the glade, where, only one short year ago, she had stood with Will on that memorable Sunday afternoon.

Lady Siddons was at home when she reached Capelthorpe, and the ladies met, and kissed one another in a way ladies have when they meet on easy terms, without any very special affection. Lady Siddons had known Sir Hugh and Lady Mannerton well enough to talk to her companion of the death of the one, and the plans of the other.

"Will your mother come here with you, my dear," she said; "I suppose you will be at Stafferton again for Christmas, won't you?"

"I don't know," was the answer, "my mother is not very well; the shock of my father's death was very great for her. I rather think she will spend the winter at Eastbourne, and then I think my husband will like to be at Heath Cross or at Halcombe"—that was the Colonel's own place —"in the hunting season." Afternoon tea

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came in just then, and as Lady Siddons poured out the tea, she remarked, in an easy, quiet tone,—

"How glad you all must have been to hear that that nice young Italian wasn't drowned after all."

Lady May grasped the arm of the chair in which she was sitting very tightly, and felt that the blood was rushing to her heart.

"Who do you mean?" she said faintly.

"Oh, Vincent was the name, wasn't it?" chattered on Lady Siddons. "You take two lumps of sugar, I think, don't you?" Lady May nodded mechanically and gasped for breath. "It was a most extraordinary escape," went on Lady Siddons, fortunately getting up to stir the fire, "Sir Godfrey had quite a graphic account of it from his friend the English doctor at Rome; quite a miracle, some poor contadini sheltered him, I believe, through months and months of fever. I am so glad; he was such a good-looking fellow, and had such pretty manners, it must have been such a relief to all of you, and especially that dear old uncle of his; I believe he has gone out to Rome to join him; but of course you know all about it."

"Indeed, I did not," answered Lady May, in as steady a voice as she could, and she bent her head over her tea cup, and placed the heel of one foot as heavily as she was able on the toe of the other, to hurt herself into steadiness of nerve. Lady

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Siddons was one of those persons whom we all of us bless at some times of our lives, not gifted with quick perceptions; but when Lady May rose in a moment or two to say good-bye, she was quick enough to see that she was deadly pale.

"My dear, how white you are! you are not well?" said Lady Siddons kindly.

Lady May staggered wearily to her feet, and tried to muster courage for a faint shadow of a smile, as she kissed her and said good-bye.

"I was a little chilly as I came, I shall put my fur cloak on going back," she said, and then she walked as firmly as might be from the room and somehow reached her carriage. As she sank back into it, and said to the coachman the one word, "Home," she felt as if life had gone out of her, and that, if she had been a moment later in leaving, no amount of resolution would have saved her from fainting. She had had plenty of sad thoughts about Will, whom she imagined had passed from a world of suffering, and she had been learning to bear up with courage; she had been trying to do her duty as a wife, as she had tried to do her duty as a daughter, and to make her husband's life bright and happy, and it had been a comfort to her to think that all this sorrow had been inevitable, and that Will could never suffer any more

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from being without her, though she had to suffer so acutely from being without him. And now—

There are storms before which the strongest natures give way. It is possible in great sorrow hardly and stoically to endure, where there is indeed no giving way, but no real victory over self. To conquer self, however, if self obtruded, was so natural and habitual with May, that the notion of darkening her husband's life with gloom because *she* had been hit hard with a terrible blow, she never in heart or act would have tolerated.

But she *had* been hit hard. The announcement made with such airy thoughtlessness at Capelthorpe had been for a moment like a death-blow. As she drove home she sat in her carriage as one in a dream. And yet, somehow, everything in the past came only more distinctly before her. Without directly thinking of it, everything on the road to Stafferton had Will's shadow cast across it. There was not a bridle-road along which they had not ridden together, not a brook they had not crossed, not a farmhouse they had not visited, not a jagged line of the great moor crags they had not watched and wondered at under the darkness of tempest or the glow of the setting sun.

Oh! those days of sunlight! where had

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they gone? We look back upon life at times of crises, and see ourselves as once we were, as though we were other, and sigh and wonder at the buried past. And now had come this heavy blow. She had married a man she did not love because she thought it was her duty, and because all happiness had gone from her in the death of her lover, and she desired to be dutiful to Sir Hugh and her mother, and she was glad to make her husband happy. And this was the end! Something more like rebellion against the ways of Providence than she had ever known before rose up in May's heart, but she put it down. Nature and grace combined to make her, even in saddest moments, clear-headed and strong. What was the use of complaining folly? God knew best; but though it might be best, she couldn't choose but suffer.

When the carriage stopped at the hall-door at the Court, May asked the footman who handed her out whether the Colonel was in the house. No, he was out with the shooters. She was glad of it. Wearily she walked up the great staircase. For one moment she paused at the window through which Will had borne her safely on the night of the fire, and then she turned to look back at the portrait of "Old Sir Hugh." There it was, that strange look in the eyes so like *him*. The whole

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scene came back when first she had seen him; how he stood below there, looking up with such joy and surprise that she blushed at his undisguised admiration. It was unbearably sorrowful. That whole old life seemed to be swept away, and now *this* made it sadder than all. Why should she not regret that he lived when she knew the blow life must be to him now. She knew what love was and suffering. Oh! better, better that he were lying under the green sea than alive to know they never dare meet again!

Poor little May! She turned the key in her door and flung herself on her bed, and threw the doors of sorrow back at last. "Oh, my love, my love, my own, my darling!" she sobbed; "how you will suffer! You will think I have been untrue to you. Oh! Will, Will, dearest," she went on, as if he were there to be addressed, "don't, only don't think that!"

"Will he come?" she whispered to herself. "No," she added, with a sort of proud confidence, "No, he is far too good and far too wise; he would never try me, he knows too well."

The thought gave her relief for a moment, but it was only for a moment, and then she flung herself down again. "Oh, Will, Will! Will!" she cried, "my own, my own lost love! My darling,

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my own lost love, you will not think me faithless! I promised you I would never marry another while you lived, but I thought you had gone from me!" And she spoke as if she were pleading with him there before her, and then cried her heart out in an agony of tears.

Poor little May! Life in its deepest sorrows has to be lived on under hard common conditions, and her conditions were harder than those of her lover; and as she sat pale and beautiful at the head of her dinner-table that evening, and tried to make things pleasant for her husband's friends, she felt in her heart that facing this new life was to her indeed facing an enemy.

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CHAPTER XVII.

COÛTE QUE COÛTE.

LITTLE did Vincent think, as the early days of September were wearing on, how entirely his strong desire that May should not know that he was still alive had been defeated at Stafferton. It was a positive pleasure to him to believe that she would think of him only as a memory, and would be no way disturbed in what he felt must be her new and struggling life, by the thought of him, in positive rivalry with her husband, rising to disturb her peace. For himself he was groping to find some definite path of duty that might lead him through the dark clouds which lay so thick before him.

When Doctor Pendrell was once convinced that Will was serious in declining to claim either his property or his title, he told him plainly that he need have no hesitation in depending on him.

"I am sufficiently rich, my boy," said he, "as you know, for your needs and for mine, and if you had all the vast wealth that really belongs to you, still when I die you would have to add to it whatever now I can call my own; why not enjoy it now?"

Will thanked the old man affectionately, indeed, as he told him, he knew all that before, knew that he would do anything, deny himself anything for him, but in his

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heart he felt that what he wanted was not money, but an object in life.

"I don't know what to do," he said to the Marchesa, "now that May has gone from me; there is one phrase of hers that haunts me, 'To be unselfish and to help other people is the only use of life;' but how to do it I can't see at present."

"I think," answered the Marchesa gravely, looking out over the view of the wide Campagna,—for it was evening when they were talking together,—and they stood on the terrace of the villa overlooking Rome, "I think"—and she locked her hands round his arm, and looked up to him as she spoke—"if I had given up about two hundred thousand a year, and an English baronetcy, and two fine properties, for the sake of a girl whose husband has deprived me of all I hoped for, I should think that I was 'unselfish' and was 'helping other people.'"

"Nonsense, Marchesa," said Will impatiently, "there's no 'giving up' of what you have never enjoyed; besides, think how thoroughly endowed I am by the pater; we have plenty, we two; and as for 'giving up,' well, I suppose a man either loves or he doesn't, and if he loves he takes the consequences."

The Marchesa clasped her hands more tightly round his arm, and half laughed as she answered, "You Durrells are the

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wickedest people *and* the best people in the world. You come of the line of the best, being your father's son, and having had that dear old doctor to love and guide you, so it's no use talking."

Will looked thoughtfully out over the wide-stretching, mysterious landscape, and answered, half-dreamily, "Well, best or worst, Marchesa, life has ended for me, except in so far as I live for the Pater, and certainly in one sense it must begin again; help me to begin it well."

The days passed dreamily, almost drearily, in spite of the sweet summer weather, at the Villa Spoleto. The doctor did not dare to make any definite proposal. The shock of Will's supposed death he had not yet got over, and he was haunted by a tormenting and perfectly groundless apprehension, that Will, in despair, might go far away and leave him. This arose from some stray words he had spoken, in his first distress, about going to the Colonies. But these were only wild words. There was no need, and therefore could be no sense in such a course, and they had never been spoken in serious earnest. The Marchesa racked her brains for some employment for each afternoon, trying in the blind way that loving people try for those in trouble, simply to be kind, and only hoping that something would turn up. And something did turn up, and all at once, as such things

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will, to those who are seeking to do right. It was now the beginning of September, and the Marchesa proposed that Will should drive with her—she had almost exhausted the drives in the Alban hills—to visit the church of S. Nilus at Grotta Ferrata. They talked as usual on the way on general principles, for people, sympathetic in a quiet settled trouble, are apt to discard the concrete, and to find their rest in a world of abstract ideas, out of which the principles of life are evolved into new forms.

The carriage stopped at the monastery gate, and Will and the Marchesa wandered together into the vestibule of the great church. They paused for a moment to look at the large black cross, which is supposed to measure the exact height of our Saviour's earthly form, and then they entered with a sense of relief—for the church was cool after the burning day—into the quiet nave. The Marchesa dipped her fingers in the stoup of holy water, and bent the knee for a moment in recognition of the Sacramental Presence which she knew was somewhere, and Will mechanically followed her example; he found no difficulty in doing so, for good English Catholic as he was, his mind had never been traversed by the clouds of extreme Protestant prejudice; and then the Marchesa led him straight to

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the extremity of the northern aisle, which is marked by the tomb of Benedict XI. The whole place told of the energetic action of the Cardinal Farnese, and Will's historical and artistic instincts were at once aroused.

"This isn't all," said his companion, after he had dilated for a few moments on the wealth of art and history that was everywhere lavished so profusely on the churches of Italy. "Do you mean to say, Mr. Vincent, that you, an Italian, or half an Italian at least, and wholly an artist—if your eye and your descent do not belie you—that you have never seen the great Frescoes of Domenichino? Then come with me;" and she led him straight to the Chapel of S. Bartolomeo.

Will was rapt in silence and lost in admiration in a moment. There is perhaps nothing even in Italy that combines so completely at once dramatic power, the instinct of colour, the sense of human beauty, and the sense of a divine idea, as these immortal frescoes. He did not begin his investigations somehow in the historical order; his eye rested first on the scene of the paralytic boy, and at last he exclaimed, "It is far beyond even Raphael's Transfiguration!" and then he gazed upwards towards the figures in the dome, and looked with loving wonder at all of them, S. Cecilia, S. Agnese, but most of all at S. Francesca Romana. "She," he said, with

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enthusiasm—speaking more to himself than his companion—"is the saintly embodiment of the spirit of prayer." And then for a moment—he felt that there was no human witness but his friend—he dropped upon his knees and buried his face in his hands. The Marchesa did not speak, but when his prayer was finished, she called his attention to the fresco of the Emperor Otho. It is perhaps the most dramatic fresco that has ever thrown, by the power of genius, the facts and feelings of long-buried ages, on a church wall for after generations to read and admire. There were the trumpeters almost compelling you to hear, by the action of their muscles, their gusty music; there was the emperor in his reverence before sanctity; there was the steed which had borne him with all the vigour of restrained life; there was the great saint who overawed them all by the simple power of goodness; and there was the little page, with his long locks falling over his shoulders, and his blue plumed cap bringing out the beauty of hair and features, as he stood at the horse's head. "How extremely beautiful!" said Will; "but there is nothing so human and so beautiful in it as that page-boy. *That* was an inspiration indeed!"

"It was an inspiration of love," said the Marchesa, "don't you know the story? Poor Domenichino loved an Alban girl as

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he painted his fresco, and immortalized her fair face in that page-boy, and her parents drove him from her, and when the fresco was displayed, and they saw their daughter's likeness, their wrath and that of their relations rose, and they drove him from the town, and he had to go out to his lonely life and paint his many undying pictures, under the sad inspiration of the memory of his lost love."

"Poor Domenichino!" echoed Will, after a long gaze in silence, "he has done a good deed that he never dreamt of; 'Out of darkness He bringeth light,' Lady Dorothy once said to me at Stafferton. The light has come, Marchesa,"—and he spoke almost gaily, "I have found my vocation, let us go."

The next morning, after breakfast, Will informed his uncle that he intended at once to leave for England, to wind up some matters which had been left unfinished at his sudden departure, and that, if he did not object, he meant afterwards to settle as an artist in Rome. Dr. Pendrell was too glad to find his nephew bent on any project, especially one near home, and a day or two later they bade good-bye to their kind hostess at the villa, and were on their way to Rome. Will insisted on taking some vacant rooms at the top of an old house in one of the narrow streets which opens on the Foro Romano, between the capitol and the church of S. Francesca Romana.

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The doctor thought the quarter too remote from the Piazza di Spagna for the purposes of a studio, but his nephew had set his heart upon it, and at last he gave in. Workmen were set to work to make the necessary alterations. The doctor took up his quarters in his old home in the Via Sistina, and Will left for England.

His journey was uneventful, he spent some days in London, avoiding all his old acquaintances, went down into Devonshire, to complete the business which had called him home, and then returned again to town by the mid-day express.

It was now the end of September. He gazed out of the railway carriage windows in a dreamy mood at the colouring autumn woods which clothe the hills that crown the Thames. He looked across half vacantly, as the train neared Slough, at the stately towers of Windsor, from the highest of which the royal standard was floating languidly before an insufficient wind. At Paddington he stepped out of his carriage, summoning a porter to gather up his smaller things, and fetch his portmanteau from the van, and call a hansom.

Suddenly his attention was arrested by the figure of a lady who had just alighted from a first-class carriage before him; her back was towards him at the moment; then suddenly she turned, their eyes met for an instant;—"Will," she said.

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"May," was his answer.

Then for a division of time too short to be described, but which seemed an eternity to both of them, they gazed at one another. Will caught by the railway carriage to steady himself, and for a moment her face became ghastly pale; in another minute she had advanced a pace or two, and held out her hand to him with a frank determination.

"Mr. Vincent, I am glad to see you. I think you know my husband." An elderly gentleman, a military-looking man, had turned round beside her, and Will recognized Colonel Marston.

"I think we have had the pleasure of meeting at Stafferton," and he grasped the colonel's hand.

"An old friend of ours, Charles, Mr. Vincent, don't you remember?"

Lady May spoke with perfect calmness, but her very lips were white.

"Glad to see you," said the colonel pleasantly, 'we were all glad that you had not been drowned. Do you make any stay in London? Won't you call upon us in Belgrave Square? We have come south for a day or two."

"Thank you, no; I am only passing," said Will, with a great effort, and now he was almost leaning against the railway carriage. In another minute they were in their carriage, and Will was standing

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hat in hand as Lady May bowed her adieux, but he saw a little hand waved out of the carriage window as it passed away towards Praed Street.

Poor Will! He stood half-dazed for a moment and then flung himself into his hansom. It is to be hoped he did not give the porter half a sovereign, as he mechanically gave him what he supposed to be a sixpence; but everything seemed to dance before him as he was whirled along to the Marchesa's house in Chesham Place, and he kept mechanically repeating to himself, "My poor little darling, she is more beautiful than ever, and how brave she is, braver than I!" Perhaps Will would not have thought Lady May so brave had he seen her burst of weeping when, after she had locked her bedroom door in Belgrave Square, she flung herself upon her sofa, and cried her heart out, saying to herself, "Oh, why should fate be so cruel? Oh, Will, oh, my lost love!"

Good women feel as deeply as, perhaps more deeply than, good men, but trust a woman to stand by the man she loves, and to do her duty in a critical moment as a man can never do. It is perhaps the gift of that most delicate tact of sympathy, and that swiftness of perception which belong to the highest, noblest natures, and which are raised to higher heights by absolutely unselfish love.

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Will left London by the early tidal train on the following morning. He was glad and he was sorry that he had seen Lady May; sorry, because he believed mistakenly that their meeting at Paddington the evening before was the first intimation she had had that he was still alive. As he went over every incident of the interview, however, Colonel Marston's remark came back upon him, and he was pleased in thinking, though he could not imagine how, that somehow or other the secret of his safety had been revealed to her before. It was a pain to him in one sense that she should know it; he loved her so deeply, that he longed to spare her any pain; but when he dwelt upon it, his English common sense came to his assistance, and he felt that things must be as they were, and no one was to blame. No one! By an absurd revolution of feeling Will had a passing desire to break the neck of that man, whoever he might be, who had added to her trouble by telling her of his existence; and then again he reflected that it was just as well, for could his own sweet May have borne herself in such a queenly fashion had she had no previous intimation before they met? But chiefly he was glad, for he was sure she loved him—his first, last love—her eyes, her voice, her deadly pallor showed it. He had never doubted it for one moment. But it

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is sweet—for we are only mortals—to have the evidence of our senses on the side of that which yet our souls do not doubt. He knew, too, that she would be all the more a high-minded and noble wife to her husband, since her marriage, implied no unfaithfulness to her old promise.

Travelling across the Continent, and making for Turin, he carried *Ettore Fieramosca* in his hand, and meant to read it; but the plains of France and the custom-house officials at Modane, and the towering Alps, and the sparkling snow of the last days of September, and then the shining little capital of Savoy, all danced before him and were all worked up into one concentrated vision of an ideal picture of strong duty and faithful love, which he expressed by the two words repeated again and again, "Sweet May."

When Will reached Rome, he was not a less grave man than when he left it, but his uncle, and the Marchesa, who came down occasionally from the villa on the Alban hills, found him quiet and almost happy. Rome has a soothing power on all who love it—and who that knows can fail to love?—the mystery of its past, its great Republic, its mighty Empire, its mediæval sorrows, its wealth of art, its dim hopes of a great future, its strange sights which even the hand of modern vandalism can never quite obliterate, its narrow streets,

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its solemn churches, its vast encircling, ever-changing Campagna, its protecting circle of everlasting hills, its turbid, rushing river, carrying legends of a thousand centuries, its overarching skies of incomparable clearness, its saddening sunsets, its pathetic dawns—all, all that no words can speak but only hearts can feel, make it for the artist and the poet, and the thinker and the Christian, *Roma Eterna*, "The Eternal City."

Will felt as Englishman, and Italian, and artist, and Christian as he was, ever afresh the spell of Rome. He had had a great sorrow; he had it still; but he had found the beginnings of a use of life in the Church of S. Nilus; and the inspiration of the page-boy of the Emperor had been struck into more vivid life by that vision of love and sorrow in the face of the woman he loved; he had felt that she had faced her life, and was doing her duty with an unflagging faithfulness to the love that she had given him. He would not be behind her in truth and duty; the thought of her would inspire him, he would do his artist's work—the work his hand had found to do—under the spell of that lasting inspiration; he would do what she had told him; he would "help other people" and be "unselfish," and he could not fail to be, what he had once promised Lady Dorothy that he would be, "faithful" to so great a love.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE C MAJOR OF THIS LIFE.

VINCENT set his face like a flint when he returned to Rome, and settled down to the work of life, which it had seemed to him was the work his hand had found to do; and that hand was no unskilled hand. Not only in the copying-room at the Doria gallery, but in all the rooms, by special permission, he exercised himself in studies from the great painters, and now he took a special interest in that mysterious human idealism which is seen at its height in the pictures of *Sassoferato*. He made sketches also from nature in the late afternoons in the Campagna; and as the autumn wore into winter, he amused himself in stray hours, standing behind the columns of half-lighted churches, in sketching figures of contadini and little children, and praying monks, and sisters of charity, which he idealized into a land of poetry and devotion, with pleasure at the present moment, but with a view to future use.

Not far from the Doria palace, in the

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direction of the Corso, was the Palazzo Spoleto, and when his now dear friend, the Marchesa, left her Alban villa and came in for the winter to Rome, her salons became the rendezvous for all sorts and conditions of men—artists who lived in galleries, fashionable English who carried London to Rome, stately monseigneurs who were in the secrets of the Vatican, French officers who were concerned with the guardianship of the States of the Church, and plotting politicians who felt that a change was coming, and were making their plans accordingly.

The Marchesa was at home with them all. She was a devout Roman Catholic, and devoted to the Holy Father; but her sunny sweetness, and a gentle and determined habit, which she made to be felt in society, and her great wealth, and the gift she had of keeping every man she met exactly at his proper distance, whilst she made him feel the breadth and depth of her really human sympathy, contributed to lend to her little palazzo a charm more potent than any exercised by the greatest palaces in Rome.

Vincent began to feel a great delight in his evenings at the Palazzo Spoleto. There was much in his nature, its breadth of sympathy, its warm Italian sentiment, its quick, artistic tact, which he had in common with

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the Marchesa. His intellect and his tastes made the company that he met there extremely delightful to him; and before the winter was half spent, the Marchesa had managed to make quite the best part of Roman society deeply interested in the rising young artist. She did it with design, for she was really interested in Vincent; the intellect in her was awakened by his genius, and the true heart in her was touched by his sorrows.

We are never sincerely interested in any one of true elevation of character without gaining our own reward, and people could not fail to notice that, while the Marchesa was as bright as ever, she was certainly more serious. She talked less nonsense, in her lighter moments, about her love for San Georgio, and her sacrifices for the Marchesa di Spoleto—at which all her acquaintances used to laugh, though they never dared to laugh to her—and she made herself, more than ever, the queen of a very composite society, including people the most different possible, all with ends and objects of their own, but finding a meeting point in the brilliant evenings at the Palazzo Spoleto.

There were one or two persons who interested Vincent immensely among the many guests that he met there; one was a certain Padre Ambrogio, who was in per-

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sonal attendance on the Holy Father. He was young in years, but old in wisdom, of great personal beauty, of great brilliancy in conversation, and of deep and real piety. He enjoyed the pleasant evenings at the Palazzo, but he held his own with the brilliant company, and never lost his balance. His deep seriousness, and the "sweet reasonableness" of his conversation, attracted Vincent; and the young priest, in his turn, was drawn to the young artist by the inward touch of a common religiousness and a common elevation of character.

Ambrogio, besides his duties at St. Peter's, led a busy and devoted life as a parish priest in the Borgo: and before long, Vincent found himself hurrying off in the early morning to be present at Ambrogio's mass, in the Chapel of the Sacrament, where he felt a seriousness in the offering of the great Sacrifice, which was more like an English priest of his own communion than anything which he had seen in Italy, and was more devoid of self-consciousness, and the spirit of a necessity to minister to edification than anything which—except in the case of Mr. Mothley—he had ever witnessed in England. Along with peasants and soldiers and priests, and gazing English visitors, and high-born Roman nobles, he found himself,

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morning after morning, "assisting" at Ambrogio's mass; and somehow, he also found that, in "assisting," he forgot the priest and lost himself in the dignity of the great Sacrifice. He soon learned to love Ambrogio, and Ambrogio to love him, and at last he persuaded the young priest to spend some leisure moments in his remote studio, and even, at length, to sit for his portrait. But Ambrogio had his revenges. He managed to persuade his artist friend to call upon him frequently at the Canonica Vaticana.

Carnival time came. It was the mere ghost of a Carnival, for Rome was shaken by the under-grumblings of a fast approaching revolution. Vincent was too deep in the waters of a great sorrow to enter actively into such festivities as the carnival could offer, and, evening by evening, he found himself pacing the solemn alleys of the Vatican gardens, and seriously discussing the rival theologies with his friend. Greek had met Greek. It was not for nothing that Vincent had so long learnt from his uncle the true power and bearing of the arguments for the position of the English Church, and had so long been under the teaching of a man, so saintly, so clear-headed, and so learned, as the Vicar of Stafferton. It was not for nothing that Padre Ambrogio had been

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so carefully trained in the exact theology of the Roman schools, had worked so faithfully amongst the poor, and had been in such constant *rapport* with the attractive presence of the Holy Father. They argued, evening after evening, with deep interest and intense seriousness; but the arguments usually ended by Vincent's remark, "In all you say, in all I see, my dear Padre, it seems to me more and more that *every* part of the Catholic Church —yours and ours—has its faults and its functions; that yours has the advantage of a strict discipline and an exact organization, but it is narrow, it is Latin; that ours has a certain narrowness, I grant, arising from our national feeling, but if it has its faults, it has the blessings of freedom; what we want is reunion, that each part may help and correct the other. What you say has for me much attraction, but it brings no conviction."

Padre Ambrogio believed, with a simple, childlike confidence, that he had a master-card to play. "Only see the Holy Father yourself, *amico mio*, and you cannot fail to be convinced." Vincent laughed, and said he would be grateful for such a privilege, and the day was arranged.

It was late in the afternoon of a day in the Passion week, when he was very graciously invited to the august presence. Vincent

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was too much of a man, too much of an artist and a Christian—ascending the great staircase of the Vatican, passing through room after room of dignity and beauty, until he reached the antechamber, where groups of monsignori were dotted about, holding small conclaves in whispered voices, where servants, in their splendid mediæval uniforms, were in attendance—not to feel the power that is upon us when we are encircled by ghosts of solemn centuries, not to feel the glamour that exercises its force on every imaginative nature in the mysterious palace of the successors of St. Peter.

He had to wait a short half-hour, and then he was ushered into the presence of the Pope.

No one who has seen Pio IX. under such conditions, can, as long as he lives, lose the impression. As for the room in which the Pope sat, in one swift glance of the eye Vincent took it all in. It was extremely beautiful, nothing was wanting, that art could give it, to its solemn splendour; but there was nothing about it which spoke of softness or luxury, nothing that an Englishman would call a couch or an easy chair. The Pope sat at what might be described as a large writing-table; he was vested in pure white, with only the usual small cap crowning his grey hairs.

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Vincent advanced from the door to the side of the Holy Father, and involuntarily fell upon his knees. With a quiet, paternal tenderness, the Pope gave him his blessing, and then, with an equally quiet courtesy, bade him rise and be seated, but Vincent preferred to stand; the innate reverence in him told him that he was in the presence of the most venerable of Bishops, in the presence of the patriarch of the West, and he stood.

Any one who has ever seen Pio IX. will remember the humorous twinkle in his eye, the benign kindliness on his countenance, *and* his extraordinary dignity: there was more than the ordinary twinkle of humour in the eye of the Holy Father as he said, "E protestante, figlio mio?" and Vincent took the humour, and half smilingly answered, "No, no, Santo Padre, Cattolico, ma Anglicano."

"Ah! va bene, figlio mio," smilingly answered the Holy Father, and then they fell into conversation.

The Pope put him quite at his ease; spoke much of his love for England, his admiration for the English, his respect for the goodness of the Queen, and his hopes that England would yet be "Catholic." He spoke serious and kindly words of the dangerous temptations of youth; told Vincent that he had heard favourably of

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his seriousness and genius; expressed his longing that Vincent might find peace "in the bosom of the true Church;" assured him of the pleasure he had felt in seeing him; and with much graciousness desired that he might have the opportunity of doing so again. He was never controversial, he was most winning and paternal, and when Vincent at last dropped upon his knees and kissed his hand, he gave him the Apostolic benediction again with such simplicity and naturalness, that when Vincent returned from the presence-chamber he felt that,—English Churchman as he was,—he was thankful to have had such an interview with such a man.

The Padre Ambrogio was waiting for him in the piazza of St. Peter's, and—good man—was a trifle disappointed when Vincent remarked, with his English bluntness, "He is a dear old man. He is a real bishop. I am thankful to you for having obtained for me the interview, but I don't see how it proves my own Church to be in the wrong."

There was another person constantly at the Palazzo Spoleto, in whom Vincent was much interested: this was the Count Corti. He was a young Roman noble, quite at sea about religion, of a warmly affectionate nature, opening his mind to the revolutionary notions which were in the air; nibbling

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with interest at the new lights of science, of which he understood very little; generally professing to be sick with life, and trying to find satisfaction, with very small results as he confessed, in the life of a mere *flaneur* in Roman Society. He and Vincent had many rides together in the Campagna, and he spent an occasional idle hour in the young artist's studio, and an occasional lazy evening in Dr. Pendrell's house in the Via Sistina.

Towards Corti Vincent was in a totally different attitude from that in which he found himself towards Padre Ambrogio; he was always defending the Christian Faith and delivering eloquent exhortations on the need of an object in life. Poor Vincent, he felt half an impostor as he argued this latter point. "Is it an object in life," he used to say to himself, "to paint fairly good pictures, and take fairly good portraits? May used to say, 'to be unselfish and help other people.' Do I help other people? Am I unselfish in the work that I do?" and no answer came but a half-despairing doubt. But no man helps other people until he has secured a foothold for his own soul, though it is also true that that foothold is usually most firmly secured in the very act of helping others. Our mental build is such that whilst we are young, any great passion is

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sure to be at first absorbing; and then in spiritual development, it is only the experiences of life, and sympathy for the sorrows of others, which in all true souls change the absorbing power of such a passion, and convert it into a spring of noble activity.

This process was going on in Vincent. He had been absorbed by a great passion; he had been hit hard by a tremendous sorrow; but he had been brave; and "ever the worst turns the best to the brave." The "turning" is often slow and painful, but in a true soul it is sure. Will had been driven down from the heights of mystic music, he was working and living on the "C major of this life," but he was gaining power—as men do who in sorrow try to do their duty—and soon he would be able to construct new chords and work out finer harmonies, in a music sweeter and stronger than that of his early love. The world of his art, the world of the Padre Ambrogio's serious arguments, the world of Count Corti's lighter complainings, nay, even the world of every-day Roman life, were combining to widen the landscapes of his soul, and to make life for him a more serious business; and yet, beneath it all, there was an unfailing spring of love and sorrow—his love and his sorrow for May. Never a night passed as the

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Roman spring wore on towards summer, without his asking himself, as he looked at her miniature on the dressing-table in his little room in the Via Sistina, "What is my darling doing? How is she getting on, I wonder?" and as he prayed for her at his evening prayer, more hope came, but no clear answer. One answer of a sort he always gave: "I am sure she is unselfish and helping other people, and I will try to do the same." Though Will could not give the answer as to matters of fact, we may.

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CHAPTER XIX.

HINC ILLÆ LACRYMÆ.

Most of that winter had been spent by Lady May and her husband at Heath Cross. There were from time to time a few guests in the house, but they were Colonel Marston's friends, and came for the hunting. Lady Mannerton was there for a fortnight, but she seemed ill and out of spirits, and soon returned to Eastbourne; and Lady May, on the plea of Sir Hugh's comparatively recent death, avoided giving invitations to her own old friends, and continued her habit of making everything as pleasant as possible for her husband and those whom he invited, while herself, with the exception of the ordinary duties of calling and returning calls, lived a life of great retirement. She took considerable interest in the poor, employed part of her time in arranging for, and superintending the execution of, a handsome stained-glass window in the north transept of the old church, to Sir Hugh's memory, and she developed a faculty for business which surprised,

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and was not altogether pleasing to, her agent. She insisted on a great reform in her cottage property, which had been much neglected under Sir Hugh's rule, and became personally acquainted with almost every householder on the Heath Cross Estate.

Colonel Marston scrupulously abstained from interfering in any way in business details relating to his wife's possessions. He had a great admiration for her, he had an honourable recognition of her right of ownership, and he soon found that she had capacities for most things far beyond his own. Lady May had so entirely devoted herself to making him happy, that knowing what he did—at least up to a certain point—of the condition of her heart when she married him, he had an increasing sense of gratitude; he never neglected her, but made it his business to make her way as smooth and easy as possible. Lady May felt this, and in an increasing degree she respected and liked her husband accordingly; she felt that he was a thorough gentleman, and it became a real source of happiness to her—gifted as she was with that high unselfishness which seems only possible to noble-minded women—that she was really making his life happy.

Deep in her heart there was an abiding

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love for her old lover, but she vigorously put away the thought from her, and determined to live by the simple rule of duty, to be faithful to her husband in all things, even, as far as she could govern them, in her inner thoughts. Weak and impulsive people persuade themselves that thoughts cannot be ruled, but, where the will takes its rightful place on the throne of our being, this, in any serious sense, is not true. Lady May was neither weak nor impulsive. She had deep and even passionate affections, but she had a strong sense of duty, and a firm will.

No one could have imagined that the bright creature, so graceful, so beautiful, who made everybody happy at the dinner-table at Heath Cross, and played her violin with exquisite pathos, to the accompaniment of one or other of the ladies who occasionally stayed in the house, was carrying deep in her heart an undying sorrow. A keen observer, indeed, might have noticed that in quiet moments there was a look of settled sadness on her face, that the lines were deeper and darker below her eyes, and that altogether she was the stately and thoughtful woman and no longer the laughing girl.

Her real times of enjoyment, if it could be called enjoyment, were the hours when with Cæsar and Judy she walked alone

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in the woods, or visited the villagers, or nursed the babies in the cottages, or heard and relieved her people's sorrows; and sometimes also she allowed herself the pleasure of writing a long bright letter to Lady Dorothy, who was now with her young nephew at Florence.

Lady Dorothy's answers were always downright and racy and even ridiculous; she saw life, or pretended to see it, through a constant haze of humour, and many a real good laugh Lady May had in reading the letters of her friend. "Dear old Dorothy," she used to say to herself, sometimes laughing unto tears, "I wonder where she came from; she certainly has inherited the fun that was in her mother with a double amount of her own;" but she felt all the time that Lady Dorothy was feeling very deeply, very keenly for her, and she was grateful that no allusion was ever made, in these letters, to the past, nor the faintest allusion to Mr. Vincent, although she was quite certain that her correspondent knew all about him, and sometimes she found it a little hard to struggle with the longing to know more about him herself.

One thing always made her a little angry with her friend, the letters invariably concluded, "And now with best respects to the Colonel, I am always your loving

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Dorothy;" she did not quite like these "best respects;" she thought she could see the ridiculous twinkle in Lady Dorothy's eye, as she wrote the words, and she thought it was a trifle naughty of her, but she always met her by the unvarying rejoinder, "My husband is better than good to me, and he sends you his warmest regards."

Lady Dorothy, on her part, was given to smiling a quaint sad smile, when she read, and saying to herself, "You are a brave little woman, you are a real little trump, that you are, but I wish from my heart that your Colonel had got his promotion in another world, and one comfort is, he is of mature age."

There was one thing that interested Lady May much this winter; under Lady Dorothy's inspiration she had set about and built a chantry chapel to the church at Heath Cross, and she had persuaded the vicar, who was a worthy man, a high-and-dry Anglican, to allow her to hang an ever-burning lamp there, and to put three more in front of the high altar, in imitation of Ravensthorpe. Her friend's answer when she told her what she had done was, "Lux in tenebris, my dear; it's a feast of lanterns; we shall soon succeed in illuminating the respectable gloom of our chilly old churches.

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I wish I could put five-and-twenty lamps—though I am afraid that is not a mystical number—to brighten the grim Protestant respectability of our English church out here; but I fear that's beyond the power of even my audacity. You should see the place, May! Everything is quite apostolic, and done 'decently and in order,' Good-bye," and then the usual conclusion.

So the winter wore into late spring, the Colonel and his wife spent May and part of June in London, and then he yielded at once, as he always did, to her desire; and they went down about the 21st of June to Stafferton for the summer.

Stafferton was looking extraordinarily beautiful. The ling was not yet out upon the moors, but the roses were out in the gardens and the birds were still singing; the beck rushed through the village with a ripple of laughter and music, and the old Court—now fully restored after the fire, with the back return covered with creepers and roses, and rebuilt in more consistent style than it had been in the past—scarcely bore a trace of that memorable June morning which had been so big with fate to Vincent and Lady May. It was always a severe trial to her to stay at Stafferton, but she had conquered herself in most things and she was determined to conquer herself in this. Lady Siddons called from Capel-

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thorpe, and May talked to her quite easily and naturally about Mr. Vincent's career as an artist, about which Lady Siddons had heard something from the inevitable Roman doctor. One of the first visits that she paid was to the Grange. Since Dr. Pendrell had given up possession, which he had done shortly after the reported death of his nephew, a retired naval lieutenant, with a large family, had taken the house. Lady May's great pleasure, however, was in her conversations with Mr. Mothley; he had been in Rome, in the spring, and she could not help finding pleasure in the occasional mention that he made—which seemed more natural than determined silence would have been—of their old friend Dr. Pendrell, and the great success of his nephew as a rising artist, and a conspicuous figure in Roman society.

Lady May set about her work at Stafferton just as she had done at Heath Cross, and, before she had long been there, her poorer tenants had become conscious that they had a mistress who meant to be mistress, but whose strong sympathy and deep sense of responsibility contributed much to their wellbeing, and even to the comfort of their lives. Lady May's enthusiasm for lighted lamps, in the church, and the chapel at the Court, as devotional

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symbols, met with no opposition from the good vicar. Mr. Blake indeed called once, spoke very seriously of the idolatrous practices he had witnessed during a visit to Italy, and when her ladyship showed him the chapel, made the nearest approach to a protest that he dare, against what Lady Dorothy called the "lux in tenebris." But Mr. Blake's feelings of respect for the landed gentry were more powerful even than his devotion to what he was pleased to label "the principles of the blessed Reformation," and the lamps burnt on, and Mr. Blake did not cease his visits, nor refuse his invitations to dinner at Stafferton Court.

Lady May had set her heart upon completing in the chapel the long unfinished tomb of the historic "Child of Stafferton," and on the morning of the 23rd of June she received from the architect the designs for the work. On that morning Colonel Marston left Stafferton for a few days, to see to some matters of business at Halcombe, and Lady May devoted most of two days to letter-writing and to consideration of the plans in the chapel. Mr. Mothley was called in to give his opinion and there was a long debate between him and her ladyship on questions of detail. About five o'clock she went for a walk alone; she chose

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the path through the gash on the fells where she and Vincent had first walked, and she sat as long as she dare, on the same rock where both of them had sat, and dreamt of many things.

It was a quiet June evening, rich with all the sights and sounds of summer, and there are few things more saddening, and yet few things more soothing than such an evening; and the peace of nature entered into her soul. She dined alone, and late, and spent her time—for now she could not help it—thinking about that day two years. She did not go to the drawing-room after dinner, she preferred to sit in the library. She sat dreaming by the fire in the very chair in which Sir Hugh had sat when he lectured her about the duties of her marriage, and she could not fail but think what a strange *dénouement* then had been to that conversation. Suddenly as she dreamed, there came before her the very vision of a long past dream: she thought she saw old Sir Hugh, and the vision of him scarcely frightened her, for she still thought she was dreaming, so deeply was she impressed by the extraordinary likeness to the image of him who, do what she would, was constantly in her thoughts. And so she gazed quite quietly at the extraordinary shadowy form before her, when suddenly she was startled by a

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sharp and piercing cry. Waving its arms in an attitude of almost hopeless beseeching, by the door of the tower, there stood a little child.

Lady May had no child, but she had the instincts of a woman strong within her, and she rose from her seat and rushed forward to soothe it. Before she had got half-way to the door of the tower, the vision, if vision it was, was gone. She stood for a moment bewildered and then staggered towards a sofa; for a moment or two, indeed, she was quite broken down. "Oh my lost love," she said; "my own, own love, there must be something terribly wrong. Why, why, oh why should such dreadful images constantly haunt this house? Why should I try to do right, and everything seem unhappy and contrary? Are the sins of the fathers to be visited on the children—yes on me, who am not a child of the house,—for ever?"

Despair is impossible to any soul who has really submitted to the lessons of duty, and Lady May was not long in despair. It was a passing spasm such as comes to any of us—the strongest—in moments of critical sorrow. She rose from the couch at last, and spoke out into the library, as if she were speaking to a multitude with quiet determination: "I will get at the bottom of this," she said; and she did.

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In the early morning, at least after breakfast, there were masons at the Court, and with them Lady May ascended the tower stairs. "They say," she said to the master-builder, "that there is a secret chamber in this tower, which nobody has ever discovered—in fact I think they have never tried. Pull the place to pieces, but find it."

The work was difficult, for the stones were strong, and when it was half done the masons found that they might perhaps have saved themselves the trouble, for a heavy stone gave, under pressure, by a long-rusted secret spring, and the secret chamber was laid bare. Lying in the corner of it was the body of a child; it was dried up and withered, but there was no decomposition; the velvet dress was limp but almost perfect, and the lace was scarcely ruffled round the neck. May looked with awe and wonder at the poor little shrivelled figure, of which, if the lips could move, they could have told some startling story.

"One secret is out at any rate," she said, "of which the real Durrells failed in the discovery. At any rate I have found the body of the 'Child of Stafferton.'"

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CHAPTER XX.

TRUTH AND DUTY.

MEANTIME life settled down with Will in Rome; and as happens to most of us, however deep our sorrows, and however strong our passions, if duty dominates, and if truth commands our allegiance, however the heart may bleed, things must fall into their proper place.

Will painted almost ferociously in his determination to be doing something; he spent pleasant evenings at the Palazzo Spoleto, he had quiet times at home in the Via Sistina, he laughed and argued with the Count Corti, and he argued with but did not laugh at Padre Ambrogio, and he steadily settled down to what was becoming to him a very grey life.

One evening just before Christmas he had gone to visit Padre Ambrogio; they had been together in the afternoon in the Padre's parish, and they ended their walk in the nave of St. Peter's. They had been moving together slowly from the western doors. The lamps were lighted in front of the altars, and the remaining

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light of the early evening was streaming into the great Cathedral, when Padre Ambrogio suddenly stopped him and pointed forward.

"Look there," he said, "look at that face." Will looked up; he saw an old priest moving down with a layman at either side of him from the high altar, under the dome. "Look at that face," said Padre Ambrogio, "that is the face of a saint." Will looked up and gazed like his friend with admiration; the dying light was on the face of the aged man, and it illuminated, not only handsome features, but a countenance with an expression of divine benignity.

"It is indeed a saintly face," said Will, as they paused and gazed.

"You can't produce that in your Anglican Church," said his friend. "The Catholic faith alone can do that; that is the face of a saint."

"It is the face of a saint," was Will's answer, "and the Catholic faith alone, I acknowledge, can produce such spiritual beauty; but, *amico mio*, I am sorry to cause you disturbance, but indeed he is a priest of the Anglican Church."

"Impossible!" said Padre Ambrogio.

"It is not only not impossible," answered Will with a smile in his voice, "it is absolutely certain. He is an Anglican priest,

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he is my own confessor; I made my confession to him only last night."

It was perfectly true—it was Mr. Mothley. Poor Padre Ambrogio! after that he almost despaired of Will's conversion; in future he was not less loving, but he was less controversial, and Will enjoyed his company all the more in consequence.

Mr. Mothley spent two months in Rome that winter. He quite understood the delicacy of the situation, and he talked very little to Will about Lady May, but he did manage to convey to him that she was doing her duty nobly, and that she was fairly happy. It was a great joy to Will to hear all this. He never asked direct questions about her, but he drank in, as "the thirsty hart drinks the water from the water-brooks," every allusion to her that dropped from his friend.

He had made a great deal of money this winter by the sale of some successful pictures; his uncle would never for a moment permit him to spend any money that he made for his own maintenance.

"You are my son," the old man used to say, "and I have more than enough for myself, and for you after me, when I am gone."

How to spend this money to the best advantage was constantly exercising Will's mind. At last he found a way in this

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wise. He was dreaming about Rome one evening, wondering whether or not life could be lived to fruitful purpose always away from May, when he chanced to pass the Minerva. He went in. There was a devotion going on in commemoration of that noble saint, Santa Catterina of Siena. The church was crowded, and the multitude of praying people in that one Gothic church in Rome was a striking spectacle. But Will's attention was called from the altar, with all its flaming lights and splendour, by the figure of a pretty little *contadina*, who was sobbing her heart out by a pillar near him, and wiping her eyes with the apron that she wore. Will's heart was very tender that night, and at last he could endure the sight no longer. He went straight up to the little girl, and asked her, in a low quiet voice, if he could help her in her sorrow.

"Oh! signor mio," she said, with the outspoken honesty that marks the Italian people, "they have taken my Leone; the police have taken him, they accuse him of being a revolutionary. He is honest, he is a good Catholic, he respects the Holy Father; he is no friend of the atheists, but they have thrust him into prison; he got into bad company, but he is only a simple *pifferaro* and he meant no harm. Indeed, indeed he meant no harm," and the poor

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little thing clasped her hands together, and could hardly speak for sobs. "And we were to have been married in a fortnight, and what *am* I to do? and Padre Pietro says that Leone is *cattivo* and I must forget him, and I can't forget him, and he is not *cattivo*. Oh, Madonna mia, what *am* I to do?"

Will's whole heart was touched, and his interest really aroused, and, through sobs and prayers to the saints and to our Lady, he at last succeeded in learning a little of Angela Marsti's story. She and her Leone were natives of Leonessa, she was staying with relatives in Rome, and her lover, as she had told him, was a *pifferaro;* he was thoughtless and young, and revolution was in the air, and the police were on the alert, and the foolish young mountaineer had compromised himself, and hence these tears.

Will took her address, it was in the *Trastevere*, and told her tenderly, but with perfect assurance, that it would soon be all put to rights. She dried up her tears and knelt down and thanked St. Catherine, and kissed Will's hand with a pretty Italian grace, and parted from him in the piazza of the Minerva, with, apparently, as quiet a confidence of succour, as if a god had spoken to her from heaven. Will told her to call

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upon him at his studio in three days' time. In the course of these three days he had had an interview with the Cardinal Secretary of State, and had explained his anxiety. Antonelli had been, as he always was, most courteous and reasonable; Leone was soon at large again; he and his little Angela were married under Will's superintendence, and the young couple had reason to bless the lover's happy incarceration, for Will, who was longing to spend his money upon somebody, endowed them handsomely, and, though the Marchesa and his uncle laughed at him unmercifully, he felt distinctly happier because he had carried out, literally, May's directions, and "helped other people."

Philanthropy has an intoxication about it like wine or gambling, and now that Will had begun to feel that money was a power for making people happy, he was greedy to find objects for his charity, and such objects naturally came to hand. His pictures were selling, and were selling at high prices, and to his great astonishment his friend Count Corti, in a ride one afternoon in the Campagna, quite unexpectedly ministered to his philanthropic zeal. It was a beautiful winter day towards the end of February, the Campagna was bathed in the clear light of a Roman afternoon, the circles of hills around it, clothed, just

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before, in a tender blue, were beginning to take the soft light of that farewell glory with which a quiet day, like a holy soul, says good-bye to its past—not without a touch of tenderness—in hope of better things.

They had ridden far, and they were coming home when they stopped for a few moments and left their horses in care of a goatherd while they examined the tomb of *Cecilia Metella.*

"What a strange freak of fortune it is," said Count Corti, "that this tomb should now be really one of the most remarkable objects in the whole Campagna. And yet, I don't suppose that Cecilia Metella herself was half so remarkable as a thousand Romans whose bones lie scattered before her in forgotten neglect. She was a good wife, and she was a good kind woman. That's about all."

"I have always told you," said Will, "if you weren't such a cynical unbeliever, that the science of goodness is about the only science really worth learning, and I had rather be a *good* man than the best artist in Rome. I daresay it is better for Cecilia Metella in Purgatory—if there be a Purgatory, and I suppose there must be, though I don't suppose that they pitch-fork the souls into those painful fires that we see painted up everywhere—I had

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rather be Cecilia Metella in Purgatory than Julius Cæsar himself."

Count Corti laughed. "Can't you be *good* without believing?"

"Rubbish, Corti!" was Will's answer; "you can never have had a real heart-ache, you can never have suffered a real sorrow, or you would know that goodness is a science so severe that it needs a master to keep you straight; I wish to God you would go and make your confession, and take the Sacrament, and try and set about and *do* something for somebody; believe me you would be a happier man than if you go fooling about with your everlasting arguments, and your expensive cigars, and your fashionable evenings, and your useless life."

Count Corti stared at him. "Amico mio," he said, "you are becoming a philosopher, and I may say, as somebody said to Paul—I forget who it was, who was it?—'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.'"

"Corti, don't be a fool," said Will, "but look here, just you look at the colour of that sunset on those Alban hills. Do you mean to tell me as you watch that glory that an artist's hand hasn't put it there? Isn't there a life beyond this life of disappointment and sorrow?" and poor Vincent sighed as he said so. "And if we *are* tried,

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and heart-broken, and disappointed, isn't the only chance to live for goodness and to hope for a better future, and to be unselfish, and to help other people?"

Corti was silent for a moment, then he said very seriously, "You are right, my friend, and I almost think that I shall join the brothers of St. Vincent de Paul." Will asked him what he meant, and the Count explained to him that he had had a circular from the good brothers who were trying to help poor people, and wanted help to do their work; and before their ride was ended, Will had quite decided,—and persuaded the Count to join with him in his project,—that he would spend what money he could make in helping that self-denying society in their noble work for the poor.

They rode home quietly and thoughtfully, and entered Rome by the Latin gate. They pulled up for a moment just beside the Lateran to watch the last rays of the sunset dying off from the Alban hills. It was a Saturday evening, and Corti agreed that he would accompany Will the following afternoon to the Padre Baldocchi's *predica* at the Gèsu; and when Will reached his uncle's house at the Via Sistina, he told his uncle that he thought he could best spend the money he had by him in helping the work of St. Vincent de Paul.

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CHAPTER XXI.

THE LYRIC LOVE.

WILL set to work harder than ever, now with an object before him, to pass his money through good hands for the service of the poor. Many a pleasant evening he had at the Palazza Spoleto, and many a pleasant ride with Count Corti on the Campagna. He did not fail in his visits to the Padre Ambrogio, but, while their friendship was unbroken, controversy between them ceased.

Will knew the Roman Church too well to be in any real danger of joining her. With his large heart and his devotional temper, he admired what in her was good and beautiful and really Catholic, but he had a clear head and strong principles, and never failed to feel the stalwart love for truth and duty, and the high appreciation of moral principle which has always marked the English part of the Catholic Church.

The more deeply he thought—and he did think more deeply, as his life and character were deepened by sorrow bravely borne—the more clearly he felt that *every*

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part of the Catholic Church had its faults as well as its virtues; and the more strongly it came to him that the faults of the Roman Church were intensified by her unhistoric claim to exclusiveness. That the Latin Church could be the *whole* Church of Christ, he saw more and more evidently to be an idea in itself absurd, almost grotesque. But he loved Rome, and he loved what was good in her special witness, and as he was trying earnestly to do his duty, he more and more loved God.

He had very quiet times in the pleasant months of that spring and early summer. He was working hard at his pictures, but one picture he had begun which he worked at with special earnestness and particular pleasure. The first idea of it had come to him on one hot day when the Marchesa had proposed to him that they should visit together the Borghese Palace. There are many beautiful pictures in that gallery, but there is perhaps none so beautiful as Raphael's "*Divino Amore.*" He had spent a long time before it, and been much struck both by the name it bore and by the look in the Virgin's eyes. Afterwards, that evening, he and the Marchesa had driven out together to the Villa Borghese.

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The grounds were in their perfection of beauty, and the beds of violets in their perfection of sweetness. He and his companion had wandered together, having left their carriage, enjoying the freshness of the evening and the loveliness of the woods and flowers; and had talked of many things. The Marchesa had been more controversial than her wont, and had lectured Will, in her own pretty, inconsequent way, on the glories of the Roman mass.

"I can quite enter into it all," he said, "for it is all part of the great possession of the Catholic Church, but my own communions on a Sunday morning, Marchesa, in our little humble English church, are a constant delight and strength to me, and attendance at your mass is a constant joy; I take it, that the ground of delight is the same, it is the Divine Presence of an Undying Love. And there is no more reason for considering that Love more real and powerful, when the rite is stately and splendid, than when it is simple and unadorned."

"Ah, yes, but then our ways are so beautiful."

"True," answered Will, "but then beauty is not necessarily exclusive truth. Divine love comes out in Truth, and that is always beautiful, whatever the accidental sur-

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roundings may be. I have an idea about ideal Love, which I am trying to work out in a picture, and I will show it you some day when it is done. I got the idea partly from that Page in Domenichino's frescoes, and it has been completed in my mind by the *Divino Amore* this afternoon."

And so he worked on at his picture.

The Marchesa left Rome early in June, to arrange her troubles at Anagni, and then went to the Villa Spoleto late in July.

Vincent stayed in Rome through a great part of the summer; he loved the quietude of those months when most people were gone. He did not fear the heat, for the house in the Via Sistina and his out-of-the-way studio were sufficiently cool. He painted pictures to order—for now his fame was known—that he might spend money with a good conscience on the charities of St. Vincent de Paul, but his happiest times were spent in working at his picture on Ideal Love.

Dr. Pendrell stayed in Rome also, for he delighted to be with Vincent, indeed he had for long been miserable when the boy was out of his sight, and he was so great a student, that he enjoyed the quiet hours indoors, when visitors were few, and the sun was strong. So the summer slipped away.

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In the middle of August they were at Gubbio together for some six weeks, and towards the end of September they joined the Marchesa at her villa on the Alban hills. They were all together again in Rome by the end of October.

Will had not been idle. He had worked at many sketches and many studies, and about Christmas, to his great delight, Lady Dorothy Masham with young Lord Ravensthorpe came to Rome. They took the very rooms, in the *Via Rasella*, which had been occupied by Lady Dorothy's mother and grandfather on a famous occasion.

Many a pleasant evening did Vincent spend in the Via Rasella, and many a pleasant walk he had that winter to visit churches and palaces with his old friend; to him perhaps the pleasantest part of it consisted in his conversations with Lady Dorothy, on the subject nearest his heart.

So things went on to the end of January, when one evening Will called at the Palazzo Spoleto, and found the Marchesa and Lady Dorothy alone. "I am so glad to find you here Lady Dorothy," he said, "for it will save me a walk to the Via Rasella. I can now kill two birds with one stone."

"I am glad you did not go to my old apartments," was Lady Dorothy's answer,

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"for you would have found them tenantless; that tiresome Ravensthorpe has thought it necessary to return to England; boys are so stupid, he has got sick of Rome, and his health is better now, and he pretends that business calls him, and being really sick of his old aunt, he has turned me over to this dear Marchesa, who has taken me in; she is always a refuge for the destitute, isn't she?" and she kissed the little Marchesa tenderly, who was standing by her on the hearthrug.

"I was bound to take her in," said the Marchesa, in a mock submissive voice, "for nobody ever denies Dorothy anything; but, oh, you will find this palazzo so sedate this winter, for where Dorothy comes there is the reign of common sense; you are my only hope, Mr. Vincent, for you are the incarnation of the Ideal, so you will help me to tone her down a little, or lift her up, which? Won't you?"

"I hope I shall lift you both up," said Vincent, laughing, "being a conceited artist, I came to announce that I have finished my great picture, and if your Ladyships will do me the honour, there shall be a 'private view' to-morrow."

"That *is* interesting," said the Marchesa, clapping her hands, "I feel sure it has distanced Raphael and the *Divino Amore*, don't you, Dorothy?"

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"I haven't the slightest doubt," said Lady Dorothy, "if you won't tell Mr. Vincent, that it is only a pretentious daub; these young artists, my dear, know a trifle about colour, but they have no divine inspiration."

"Well," said Vincent, "after that I am more frightened than ever at constituting you 'the carping critics,' but if you will come, I shall try to bear it."

And so the thing was settled.

"Mr. Vincent," cried Lady Dorothy, as he was leaving the room, after having said good-night, "I won't go unless you tell me the name of your picture; you can't judge of a work of art till you know the standard which the artist proposes to himself, and the name is the only guide to that standard."

"Then I am hopeless," laughed Vincent, "for my standard is so high that I can't flatter myself that I have attained to it, but then,

> 'A man's reach ought to exceed his grasp,
> Or what's a heaven for?'

"That's *Browning*," said Lady Dorothy.

"Just so," said Will, "and my name is from Browning, I call my picture 'The Lyric Love.'"

"The Lyric Love," cried the Marchesa, "what a pretty name! What can it mean?"

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"How like you, Lucia; do you think it pretty because you can't understand it?" said Lady Dorothy; "it sounds to me sheer nonsense, but that is like most of what *Browning* writes."

Vincent threw himself into a mock theatrical position, and began to recite,

> "Oh British public! you who love me not,
> God save you,"—

You are a real 'British Public,' Lady Dorothy. Browning write nonsense indeed!—why, he is the greatest living teacher. You read his new poem, 'The Ring and the Book,' the greatest poem since my Dante, and there you will find my 'Lyric Love.'"

"I am sure I shouldn't understand a word of it," was Lady Dorothy's answer, "though I shouldn't be so silly as Douglas Jerrold about *Sordello*, and think that in consequence I was going mad."

"You are not likely to go mad, Lady Dorothy," laughed Vincent, "but I'll promise you, you will be a deal more sane, than even *you* are, when you take the trouble to learn from Browning."

"Well, dear Mr. Vincent, I shall learn from Browning through your Lyric Love, and whether I like *him* or not, I am sure to like *it*, for your sake, and for the sake of somebody else," and she pressed his hand

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kindly, saying good-night, and he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"That *is* a good soul," said Vincent to himself, as he strolled down the Corso, "and how 'cute she is! how *did* she know?"

"Lyric Love indeed," said Lady Dorothy, turning to the Marchesa when Vincent was gone, "the poor boy is as mad as ever about that sweet little May. He thinks he has painted an ideal picture, I have no doubt he has done an excellent likeness of her."

The ladies breakfasted early at the palazzo, and they breakfasted together in the Marchesa's private sitting-room; when Lady Dorothy appeared, she found her hostess there before her the following morning, and she was reading her letters.

"Oh, Dorothy, she said, as soon as her friend was in the room, "what *do* you think? I have had such excellent news from England, that odious man is dead, he has broken his back, or his neck, or something, out hunting on his ill-gotten properties, I am so very glad."

"You bloodthirsty little wretch!" answered her friend, "who can you mean? It isn't Spoleto's uncle, is it? who gave you such trouble about the house in London. You are a real Italian, smiling like an angel, and prepared for any atrocious crime."

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"Spoleto's uncle, indeed!" as if I care how long he lives; why, of course there is only one man that I want to die; of course it is Colonel Marston; and now they can marry and be happy."

"Lucia, how dreadful! Colonel Marston dead! How can you talk in such a dreadful way?"

"Well, my dear, then I'm very sorry," said the Marchesa, pouting, "and we'll both go into mourning if you like, and I'll have some masses said for him, even though he was a heretic; but I am a little glad, it will be so nice to tell Mr. Vincent to-day."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, I hope, Lucia," said Lady Dorothy; "I think your levity about such a serious thing is very wrong, it seems to me quite shocking."

"Oh, I know, Dorothy," said the Marchesa, "you English always think it is necessary to do your duty, and you think it is your duty to pull long faces for five minutes at least, when you hear about somebody's death. I'll try to look grave for ten minutes if you like, if you will only let me tell Mr. Vincent, and feel a little pleased. I am sorry for the poor gentleman," she said, with a ridiculous air of gravity which made Lady Dorothy laugh in spite of herself, "I trust he didn't die in great pain or anything of that sort,

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you know, and I hope he'll have a good time in Purgatory, but it will be *so* nice for Mr. Vincent and Lady May," and she clapped her hands with joy at the thought of it.

Lady Dorothy laughed heartily at last. "You dear little darling absurdity," she said, as she kissed the Marchesa affectionately, "you do mix up grave and gay in such a medley, it is impossible to be angry with you; but tell me how the poor man died."

The Marchesa gave her the letter and she read it.

It was a business letter from the Marchesa's agent in London, entering into various details about her English property, and asking for directions as to the letting of the house in Chesham Place.

At the end of the letter the writer added, "Your Ladyship will be grieved to hear that the husband of your friend, Lady May Marston, has come to a sad end. When hunting at Halcombe he had so severe a fall from his horse, that the spine was seriously injured, and the poor man only lingered in a state of semi-consciousness for three days. This has cast a great gloom over the neighbourhood, and Lady May Marston, who was assiduous in her attendance on her husband is, I understand, in the deepest sorrow."

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"Well, it is very dreadful," said Lady Dorothy; "poor little May, she has had a lot of trouble, it must have given her a dreadful shock."

"I don't see why she should be so grieved," said the Marchesa gravely, "I was very sorry when Spoleto died, but then, you know, dear, San Georgio had married that ugly Russian, and Padre Falbi said that it was quite providential; I suppose it it is not irreligious to think"—and she spoke in a beseeching tone—"that this good man's death is providential; you see he didn't suffer much pain, dear, for the letter says he was only semi-conscious, so I may be a little pleased, mayn't I?"

"Lucia, there is really no doing anything with you," said Lady Dorothy, laughing, "let us go to breakfast, but promise me, upon your honour, that you will not say one word about it to Mr. Vincent."

"I promise," said the Marchesa in a regretful tone, "but I should like to have told him. I think you are a little hard, Dorothy, and I am sure you are very domineering; however, I always do as you tell me."

And so the matter was settled, and Lady Dorothy knew, to her great satisfaction, that the Marchesa could be trusted, and that she would keep her word.

They visited Vincent's studio that day,

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and they honestly admired the picture. It was a beautiful picture, and most carefully finished, but Lady Dorothy had been perfectly right; it was an exquisitely idealized likeness of the May Roseby that Vincent had seen for the first time on the great staircase at Stafferton. Vincent had had it placed in a handsome frame designed by himself, and in illuminated letters below the picture was the legend:

> "Oh, Lyric Love, half angel and half bird,
> And all a wonder and a wild desire."

As Lady Dorothy gazed at it her eyes were full of tears, and as the ladies drove back together to the Palazzo Spoleto, "What a beautiful faithfulness his has been!" she said, "it reminds me of my dear father and mother."

"I don't think it is all a 'wild desire,' said the Marchesa, "he is a delightful person, and she is most beautiful, and I do think it is all quite providential, and I do think, Dorothy, it is very hard that you wouldn't allow me to tell him. I had to tell him the bad news, it's cruel of you not to let me tell him the good."

"You are very wicked, Lucia," said Lady Dorothy, but she couldn't help smiling through her tears.

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CHAPTER XXII.

"IL FONDAMENTO D'AMORE È SEMPRE LA FEDE."

THINGS had settled down with Vincent to a steady beat of life. And as they did so the earlier dawn of hope after his great sorrow was becoming in his character the "light of common day." He was established as an artist. He was making money in his profession, and as his uncle refused to allow him to work for his own livelihood, and insisted on his being partner in all the said uncle's possessions, he was spending the money he made usefully for relief of poor and distressed persons.

The society of S. Vincent de Paul had won his heart by its simple and real charity, and he gave largely to help on its work; he kept his eye upon his protégés, and advanced their happiness in a thousand ways; he had visited Aquila and taken care that his old benefactors should want for nothing, and in all spare moments he had thrown himself with intelligent interest into the society where he was ever a welcome guest at the Palazzo Spoleto. Still life was "common day"

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now. Sometimes, as to all of us, he had dark hours when his old hopes and disappointments rushed over him in sudden deluges of trouble, but these became fewer. His religious feelings had deepened and settled, and he had learnt the great lesson gradually, through sorrow bravely borne, that man must have something solid to fall back upon when earthly hopes and props give way.

At first May herself in her own personality and image, had been the constant companion of his thoughts; but this gradually changed. A feeling had grown upon him that he must not allow the thought of one —even though vowed to him, and torn from him by what seemed a cruel freak of fortune—to possess his heart and thoughts in that direct and personal way, now that she was the wife of another man.

Vincent's principles were proof against the slipshod morality by which some men persuade themselves that they have a right to love apart from, and in defiance of, sacred sanctions. He had loved May Roseby passionately, absorbingly. He had loved her really; not her beauty, nor her charm of manner, but herself. Lady Dorothy had been right in speaking of him as "faithful;" but the faithfulness was deeper than she had dreamt of. His love for May had been founded

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on the stern foundation of faith in her goodness, and truth of character; it was founded on a deeper faith still. To the ideal he had had given him he would never be untrue. No other woman could he ever make his wife. But the love had become more and more ideal. He never asked about her now. He thrust vigorously from his mind recollections of past scenes, never allowed himself, even to himself, to name her name. His picture of "the Lyric Love" expressed his deepest thought. It was "all a wonder and a wild desire," and nothing more. On his faith in beautiful goodness which he had known, on his faith in God from Whom all beauty and goodness come, had been founded an ideal love which strengthened and purified his character. Only in moments of prayer, or at the Mass, or at times of communion did he even dare to name her name. Such secrets may be safely whispered *in Sanctis*, when at other times there would be danger, and so he did.

People who knew him well, noticed gradually how much of his old impetuosity was gone. He did not look older; indeed his handsome face sometimes had an expression of almost childlike youth, but it was more deeply lined. Self-conquest had left its marks upon him. He was thinner and paler, and his large dark

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eyes had more quiet hidden fire. There was a calm determination about him, too, which impressed those who came near him, a greater steadiness of energy, and a sunny sweetness in entering cheerily into all the work he found to do and into the pursuits and thoughts of others. A strong faith and a deep love are powers of incalculable consequence, where they are allowed to have their perfect work. His faith in May, and his love for her, had been too deep and too sincere to allow him to insult her either by becoming a sour and angry cynic, or by dwelling upon her old tie to him, now that she was another man's wife.

It had been a great struggle and a sore one, but Will at last had conquered. To work, to follow her own formula, "to be unselfish and help other people"—this had been his line of battle, and this by *that* help which comes to all of us if we seek it, had been his path to victory.

One duty had clearly presented itself to his mind after the first shock, a duty too often forgotten, because men will not recognize it as a duty, and that was *to be strong*. He had his reward. Of May he no longer allowed himself to think as a lover. But he was in possession of an ideal love which gave an energy to and suffused a sunlight over all his life and work.

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The first stage in such a battle lands the soul on a plain where it only sighs, and sees a dreary expanse before it, with all the early brightness and beauty gone; but as the soul perseveres, there rise the crests and outlines of the distant hills, and it feels that life is a larger, nobler thing than a mere ministration to one's own happiness, or even to the happiness of any *one*, however dear, and beautiful, and loved.

Lady Dorothy had noticed the silent change; she had felt that all the old charm was there, but there was something deeper and stronger as well; she had felt too that Will more and more avoided all allusions to Lady May and his old life, and so gradually she had taken care herself to avoid the subject. She did not quite understand it, for she was sure that his affection was unshaken, but there was something about him that awed even her, and when they were together she was conscious that he was no longer the charming handsome boy to whom she could dictate in her downright fashion as formerly, but a strong and to her somewhat perplexing character which awed her while it charmed.

It was from a feeling of this sort that she had been led to insist to the Marchesa upon silence about Colonel Marston's death.

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The very day after she had been to the studio to see "the Lyric Love" she walked up to the Via Sistina and asked to see Dr. Pendrell. She informed him of Colonel Marston's death, and suggested that possibly he might be of use to Lady May if he could see his way to visiting England.

"I will go at once," the doctor said; "but how about Will?"

"I have not told him a word," was Lady Dorothy's answer.

"You are right," said, Dr. Pendrell, "I am sure it is better;" at least not at present; he may hear it of course in other ways."

"If he does, he will blame neither of us," said Lady Dorothy.

"No," answered the doctor, "certainly not."

As Lady Dorothy walked home, she bought a bunch of violets from a little girl on the steps of the Trinita de' Monti, so as she went slowly down the Corso she talked to her violets.

"The old man feels as I do," she said, "it may come out in any way, but we must not thrust it upon him. I don't know what the end may be, but they must work out their own destiny. I don't think he would be happier for knowing it, at least not yet."

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And so Dr. Pendrell went to England "on business."

Vincent's life in Rome went on as usual. One additional interest he had that spring; it came about in a curious way. He had a habit of going for an early morning's stroll to enjoy the fresh chill air of the Roman spring.

On this occasion he found himself outside the gates on the Ostian Way, when his artist's eye was struck by one of those picturesque figures so common around the old city, at least in those days before it had become the Italian capital. A goat-herd was seated on a bank near San Paolo; he was of singular beauty, and he was clothed as a Sylvan Pan, his goats were browsing round him, his arms were folded, his goat-herd's staff was lying by him, and he was gazing dreamily towards the distant sky. Will took out his sketch-book and sketched him; the man never stirred nor seemed to notice him, and when the sketch was finished Will advanced and sat down beside him and entered into conversation. His name, he told him, was Francesco Bononi, and his home was in Leonessa; he came down in October to pasture his flocks, and returned in June to the Abruzzi.

"How do you spend your time here?"

"I read," answered Francesco, much to Will's astonishment.

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"Read what?" said Will.

Francesco put his hand deep into the left breast pocket of his leathern coat and pulled out an old book. It was a history of the Wars of Alexander. Will glanced at the book for a moment, and then he and his new friend entered on a discussion of the Macedonian Empire. Franceso told him that he and many others had been taught to read and write by the Curato of his parish in the mountains, whom he described as a good and kindly man; but he complained of a want of books, and especially of maps,—for which he had a great longing,—and at last appointed a *rendezvous* with Vincent for the following day, when the latter promised to meet him, armed, if possible, with the maps which Francesco desired, and with the History of England or France or of early Rome which he said he wished to read.

On the following day Will was punctual to his time, and he found his new friend with some dozen others. They astonished him by their intelligence, and their interest in some rather antiquated maps which he had unearthed in the bookstalls behind the Minerva, which gave them the liveliest pleasure.

This opened a fresh interest to Vincent that spring. Two or three times a week he met his assembled friends; they had

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discussions on Religion, Politics, History, and with some of them, and above all with Francesco, Vincent formed real friendships. So time wore on, and day by day he had the quiet happy sense that his life was not without its uses for others as well as for himself.

In the early autumn he fell in with his uncle's proposal to visit the eastern coast of the Adriatic. They went by way of Ancona, and paused for a couple of days to visit Fano.

They were interesting times just then in Italy. Revolution was in the air. There was much hope, there were many fears, there was abundant enthusiasm. The Italians are not naturally an enthusiastic nation. They are in many ways like ourselves; but they are entirely wanting in that deep and settled enthusiasm, often concealed, but always there, which marks the English people. A great national hope, however, gives birth to a great national enthusiasm; and there was real life in Italy at the time. These were the days of Manzoni, of Massimo d'Azeglio, of Giusti, of Cavour.

Vincent could not but feel from his half Italian parentage a sympathy with the enthusiasms of the time, and yet he was very far indeed from closing his eyes to its dangers. He sympathized with the longing for liberty, but he was practical Englishman

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enough to see that there was a reverse side to the picture, and that even such great things as Italian liberty and Italian unity must be paid for by heavy prices. Tosti has said very truly that facts have their immediate relationship to the men who actually work them out, but have a higher and more lasting relationship to Humanity at large. It is thus that we are bad judges of the real meaning of the history of our times, and that we require to stand at some distance from events before we can form any just appreciation of their relative position and general tendency. Still Vincent felt a sympathy for the rising enthusiasm of the time, and especially for the literary men who adorned it. He lived to see the day when the place of these men was taken by such as Stecchetti, Praga, Carducci, men altogether inferior in their aims and genius to those who went before them. Problems arising out of these things were exercising his mind, and in this journey with his uncle they were much discussed. He worked hard during that journey at his sketches, but his mind was busy on religious and political questions, and his character was deepening accordingly.

There are persons who receive shocks in life so selfishly, that they gain nothing by the teachings of adversity, and are apt

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to remain to the end little else than complaining children; such was not the case with Vincent. He was no longer the merely enthusiastic boy or heart-broken lover, he was a grave, hard-working, earnest man.

It was a beautiful evening when they reached Fano, and they remained in the place several days. They had stopped two days before at Pesaro, and had spent some time inspecting the old Palace of the Della Rovere, and Vincent had made several sketches. Dr. Pendrell had employed a few hours looking at the MSS. of Tasso in the Bibliotheca, and Vincent had helped him in making notes of some passages of interest. But it was at Fano that they really lingered; the Arch of Augustus, and the pictures at Santa Maria Nuova gave Vincent plenty to think about; but it was in the Church of San Francesco that he spent most of his time; he made a sketch of the beautiful figure of Pandolfo's wife on her fourteenth-century tomb, and of some of the figures of the saints on the brackets above it; but what they really both desired to see again most of all, was Guercino's Guardian Angel. Vincent was reminded by it of a conversation which he had had long ago—or it seemed long ago—on the subject with Lady May. It was in a quiet afternoon

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that they were gazing at the Angel, and he had said to his uncle that it seemed to him to be an apt symbol of the Providence of God, and had remarked to him that one comfort was that whatever doctrines of the Faith the English people had lost hold of, they had never lost hold of that.

"There are many losing hold of it now," Dr. Pendrell observed, "through the advance of what is called the 'scientific spirit.'"

They had discussed together the reality of Providence, notwithstanding "the reign of law," and it was there for the first time for many a month, that Vincent spoke to him of his great disappointment in the past.

"It is all right," he said, "except for her." For me, I was not worthy of her. Life has been sad enough without her, but I can see now what a dreamy, idle boy I was, and how this sorrow has shown me something of the meaning of life.

He talked on seriously in this strain on their way home in the quiet sunny evening. To Dr. Pendrell it sounded like the voice of one who had passed through much, and become strong because he refused to despair.

"Dear Will, things will yet be brighter," he said, "you have been a brave boy; God bless you!"

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He did not dare to tell him of Colonel Marston's death many months before, but nevertheless the doctor cherished hopes for them both in his own heart, and felt that there had been a Providence guarding his boy, and that where faith and love are cherished in any soul, things cannot go far wrong.

In after years Will often remembered that evening, and Guercino's "Guardian Angel" at Fano.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

"GOD FULFILLS HIMSELF IN MANY WAYS."

It was late in the following spring when Vincent and his uncle returned to Rome. The doctor had not been well; he had been uneasy, unsettled and anxious. His visit to England had convinced him that Lady May Marston had not really forgotten her early love, although since those days —which seemed now so far away—she had passed from light-hearted girlhood to the responsible duties of a great land-owner and of a good and faithful wife. He did not conceal from himself the hope that his early scheme for Will might yet be accomplished, but as he knew that time must elapse before it was decent even to think of such a thing, he thought it better that he should, if possible, remain in ignorance of Colonel Marston's death. Lady Dorothy had so wished it, and the doctor, like many other people, had contracted a habit of deferring to Lady Dorothy's views. It was certainly better, he thought himself, that Will should not be again "unsettled." And yet Doctor Pendrell was not easy. His life was so bound up in his adopted

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son's, that to see *him* unhappy was himself to be miserable; and now that he thought there was a chance of happiness for Will, he was uneasy and restless lest some fresh *fiasco* should occur.

At first Lady May's marriage had been to the doctor a terrible sorrow; but he had noticed how in these months of trouble Will's character had deepened. He had seen his religious principles tested in the field of controversy, where the really beautiful side of the Roman Church had allured him with all its attractions; he had seen his character tested too in the field of human duty and human sorrow; and he had seen it bear the strain. He was very proud of him; he was fonder of him than ever, if that was possible, and now that a hope of happiness came in sight he was uneasy and restless lest there might be further trouble.

Will did not know the cause; he thought his father simply out of health; but he did notice the fact of his restlessness, and so he abandoned many of his plans for that winter, and fell in with the doctor's restless desire to be on the move. They had crossed from Ancona to Ragusa to spend a little time on the Dalmatian coast.

Few people even now know the extraordinary beauty and interest of the cities on the eastern shore of the Adriatic, fewer

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knew them then. Doctor Pendrell and Will enjoyed to the utmost the unspoiled glories of Spalatro, Sebenico and Cattaro; they passed on by way of the Ionian Islands to Malta, and then to Sicily, and it was the middle of March before they were again in Rome.

And how had things been going in England all the time with Lady May? Sadly and soberly. The account of Colonel Marston's death given by the Marchesa to Lady Dorothy had been substantially true. It had been painfully sudden, and the shock to his wife had been severe. Lady May had never really loved her husband; but he had been a kind and considerate husband, and she had been a dutiful wife.

It is impossible for two people to live together for a considerable time, both possessed of high principles and kind hearts, without feeling for one another a very high degree of esteem and even of affection. "Love," it is said, "comes but once." In one sense this is true. It was impossible for Lady May ever again to love in the way in which she had, with her whole young heart, loved Will Vincent. But Duty had commanded her to control and in one sense banish that love, and she was one of those noble creatures in whom elevation of character and the grace of God

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gave imperious sanction to the call of Duty. She had been perfectly open with her husband as to the state of her affections. Vincent had become a sweet and real dream, but still a dream. She had acted bravely as her lover had acted, and thrown herself with all the energy of her strong character into the duties of her life. And she had her reward. She was not unhappy. She had been indeed at first inclined to ask with the poet,—

"Of love which never found his earthly close,
What sequel? Streaming eyes and breaking hearts?
Or all the same as if he had not been?"

At first, too, in half-wild despair, she had been tempted to answer in the affirmative that awful question. Then the time came when she was able to say for herself and—far more truly than she could know for certain—for her lover,—

"But am I not the nobler through thy love?
O three times less unworthy! likewise thou
Art more through Love, and greater than thy years,
The Sun will run his orbit, and the Moon
Her circle. Wait, and Love himself will bring
The drooping flower of knowledge changed to fruit
Of Wisdom. Wait: my faith is large in Time,
And that which shapes it to some perfect end."

What the "perfect end" was to be she little dreamed, but slowly and surely a firmer purpose, and a cheery, loving acceptance of duty had become the con-

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sequence of that early love, so cruelly blighted, so bravely used.

She was not unhappy. And all around her—her friends, her tenants, and above all her husband, were happier for her goodness. Colonel Marston was a better man for having married Lady May, and in his heart one real anguish in the hours which intervened between his accident and his end was the anguish of leaving her.

"You have been very good to me, dear wife, and God bless you for it!" the poor sufferer had gasped out as she sat beside his bed and chafed his forehead and his hands the night he died.

"You, too, have been very good to me, dear husband," she had whispered to the dying man as she kissed him. And as she closed his eyes, the tears she shed were tears of real wifely affection as well as of womanly pity.

The image of him was not, indeed, could not be, deeply enshrined in her inmost heart as Vincent's was; and yet when he was gone she felt very desolate. Her mother came back to live with her. But Lady Mannerton was a woman of broken health, in whom the spring of life was gone, and whilst tending her was an occupation and a happiness to Lady May, she had found in

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her society now no real companionship.

Souls travel in different tracks. They are together for a moment where the roads divide, but farther and farther they are often parted as the path goes on in different directions; except indeed where a strong and faithful love unites them, *then*, however otherwise far apart, there is no parting; Lady May's soul and character was travelling fast, and it had long been, and now more than ever, into an unknown land where ordinary companionship is not possible.

She settled down to her old life with resolute determination after her husband's death. She occupied herself much with the care of her people. The one person who was her dearest companion, guide, co-worker and friend, was Mr. Mothley. She erected a monument to her late husband's memory at Heath Cross, and completed the chapel at Stafferton. For hours she would sit alone in the library there at night when Lady Mannerton had gone to her room, and then allow herself to think sadly over the few years which had changed her life from the sunlight of morning to the evening of a grey and cloudy day.

Strangely enough, since the burial of the body of "the Child of Stafferton"

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she saw nothing of those astonishing apparitions which had alarmed her in the past. She often thought of them, speculated about them, and half-fearfully wished again to see them—but they did not come. Everything seemed quiet, ordinary commonplace and sad. And so the time wore on. People in the neighbourhood and in London began at last to whisper that "of course Lady May Marston would marry again." But no shadow of such a thought ever seemed to flit across her mind. As for Will, his name had never crossed her lips for long, and his image lay just as it had lain, deep buried in her inmost heart, so deep, it seemed never likely to rise again.

The edge is taken off life by shocks of sorrow. Her life seemed blunted. Strong feelings had become deep principles, but all the old impetuousities, even the ever-springing hopes, seemed laid at last, and finally, in their graves.

Colonel Marston had died in January. In the following September Lady May was at Stafferton. It was a beautiful September. The warmth of summer was lingering in the air, and its glow in the sky, but there was that peculiar clearness which is noticeable in the north of England; and across the craggy hills, and along the valleys lay thin, blue, slowly—creeping mists.

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The moors were in extraordinary beauty,

> " An empty sky, a world of heather,
> Purple of foxglove, yellow of broom ;"

the ferns were in richest plumage in the crevices of the rocks, the mountain ash hanging from the ledges, gathered under its crimson berries, a chequered shade; the woods in the park, and the trees down the beck side were changing into a thousand splendid varieties of colour; there were crisp mornings, and still clear evenings. It was a beautiful September.

Lady May had begun to ride again about the dale country, as she had done long ago. The distant views, the rush of the sweet fresh air as she galloped on, the pretty glimpses of changing autumn colour, and the motion of her favourite mare, soothed and comforted and set her dreaming and thinking when nothing else did.

When the heart has been bruised, when the deepest affections of the soul have suffered, when shock after shock has tried the whole material of the being; when character has been high and principles are strong, and the sufferer has refused to succumb to selfish repining; when duty has conquered and life has been lived for others—then there come times when the soul, to stand strong and steady, must be alone, alone with Nature and with God.

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Lady May worked hard in the mornings at her letters, her accounts, her business. In the early afternoon, and two days in the week at least *all* the afternoon, she was about the cottages of Stafferton interesting herself in real earnest with the wants and sorrows of others; but the hour came when alone, walking or riding, she found strength and consolation alone on the wild moorland roads.

Dear Nature! She never contradicts us, she never argues, she requires no explanation; alone and calmly she goes her way, and if the heart is aching and the mind perplexed, she, with her spring flowers or flying clouds, or colouring leaves, has always a sympathetic pulse to beat, or a loving word to say. Lady May felt this; her times with her mother, and her times with the villagers were seasons of external duties, and she threw herself into them with her whole heart; but to do so well, she needed above all things the quiet hour, and the lonely rides when Nature was her only companion—never contradicting, and never criticizing, but always sympathetic.

"My Lady is going her ride this afternoon, God bless her!" many a villager used to say as she rode out of the park gates waving her hand, and smiling kindly to one and another, as she trotted down the beck side.

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" Eh ! my word ! she mun be lonely sin' the colonel's death," said one old woman, leaning over the bridge, " How she can ride by hersel' I canna tell ! "

" Nay, neighbour," said her friend beside her, " she's ne'er lonesome, she always looks as bright as the mornin'."

" Eh ! my word ! " struck in an old fellow on crutches, " she be lonesome enough, poor lass, sin' that gradely lad Vincent went as she used to ride wi', as fur t'oud colonel I reck'n nowt o' he."

" She be a good 'un, anyhow, she be," was the response of his neighbour as her ladyship passed on.

It was quite the close of September when one clear afternoon after luncheon Lady May ordered her mare, and told her groom that she should not need his attendance. She had been restless and unhappy all the morning, she hardly knew why, and a fancy had taken her to ride up to Morton-in-Herblesdale, a road she had never ridden since the day when she and Vincent had gone together—it seemed years ago—when they had talked of his *Viaggio Raffaelesco.* It was just such another afternoon, only later in the year, one of those quiet days when Summer seems to invade the realm of Autumn and assert her supremacy, for a moment, ere she finally succumbs.

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When Lady May reached the rugged pass where Vincent had described the heights of Urbino, she reined up her mare and turning her head towards Stafferton, gazed across the valley below. All the love and sorrow and trials of those past years came over her, and she allowed herself for the first time to feel, in all its intensity, the loneliness of her life.

"Oh, Will, Will!" she said to herself, and her tears flowed fast as she permitted the old name to pass her lips, for the first time for many a month; then she was angry with herself, as if she had been disloyal to an obligation that she had long determined to recognize.

"My poor husband," she said, "you were very good to me!" and she dashed away her tears, and set herself to recover the old balance of mind as she rode home.

When she reached the hall door at Stafferton and dismounted, she paused for a moment to speak to the groom. She had pushed her riding-hat a little back from her forehead, she was holding the skirt of her habit with the left hand, and in her right hand was her riding-whip. One long tress of hair had escaped and fallen over her shoulders, and her pale cheeks had an unwonted colour from the motion of riding and the wind. Had any

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one been there to see her, they could hardly have imagined a fairer picture.

It was the same girlish face and the same girlish form as in days gone by, with only the deeper lines that had been traced by determined purpose and energetic devotion to duty in spite of deep sorrow.

And there *was* some one there to see her.

"You dear, beautiful thing, where have you been? keeping me waiting this hour and a half since I landed here from Settlethorpe. You will take an old friend in, won't you? who has trudged across Europe to see you,—a sight worth seeing, as I think, now that I'm here."

"Dorothy," said Lady May, for indeed it was Lady Dorothy standing with arms akimbo and her walking-stick hanging from her right hand, and looking up towards the hall door from where she stood on the drive. In another minute they were locked in one another's arms, and Lady May felt so happy, and the sense of loneliness all gone, now that she had her old and trusted friend.

That was a very pleasant evening at Stafferton Court, and when Lady Mannerton retired to her room, Lady Dorothy explained the reason of her visit. She had heard that Lady May was not very well;

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that Lady Mannerton was leaving her to go back for the winter to Eastbourne; that Lord Ravensthorpe had settled down for his studies in London to prepare for the army; and she settled it in her mind that, as she had taken a house in Rome for the winter, it was clearly necessary that Lady May should be with her. She managed dextrously to let her know, without laying too much emphasis on the fact, that Dr. Pendrell and his son had gone for the winter across the Adriatic, and in her own dominant way she managed to carry her point.

They spent one happy week together before leaving Stafferton.

On the night before the final departure Lady May had retired to her room, and sat for long gazing into the fire; suddenly there came upon her the memory of her dream of long ago, and a fancy seized her to rehearse the act of that past time.

She took her candle in her hand and went down the great staircase, she paused for a moment at the window through which Vincent had carried her from the burning room, she paused to gaze at the picture of old Sir Hugh, and then she passed into the library.

She was in a mood for dreaming; all her life seemed a dream to-night, and she blew out the candle and stirred the sinking fire.

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She threw herself into the great arm-chair, and remembered with tears—for she had loved her stepfather tenderly—the conversation which she had had with Sir Hugh on that very spot; she remembered also how there too she had talked to her husband, before he was her husband, of the conditions upon which she would become his wife. She remembered as well, many conversations which she had had in that room with Vincent; and in all those memories which came up—as they do at such times—as living presences, although she was conscious of many and bitter sorrows, her conscience told her she had nothing to regret. Such is the reward of those who faithfully follow the divine voice.

She lay back in her chair and dreamed. The fire was burning low, the wind was sighing round the old court, the trees were moaning before the rising gale, and the rain-drops were striking on the window-panes. Suddenly she had that strange feeling of which we all are conscious at times, of a presence in the place; she thought she saw a shadowy figure flit along the library and, looking up, she was sure she saw the old Sir Hugh of former days gazing at her from the corner by the tower door; but there was no terror or anguish in the face, it seemed to be haunted by a happy smile,

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and a shaft of mingled joy and sorrow shot through her whole being as she noticed no longer the hard and suffering, and almost cruel look, but a strong and tender likeness to the man she had loved so well. She rose from her chair with an instinct of welcome in her heart, but the vision was gone. Whether she saw him or not, or whether it was only a dream, it was the last time that any one even imagined that old Sir Hugh was seen at Stafferton.

Truth and duty and goodness will lay the most terrible ghosts.

Lady May left the library that night without any sense of fear. She went straight to the chapel; the shadows were rising and falling under the fitful light of the lamps above the tomb of the "Child of Stafferton."

On her knees before the altar she placed her Past in the hands, and commended her Future to the care, of that loving Father who watches over us all, and then she went quietly to her room.

The next day she and Lady Dorothy left Stafferton for Rome.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

"LOVE THAT FOUND ITS EARTHLY CLOSE."

THERE are grey days in the early autumn when, after the fret and the dust of the city, we find ourselves on the cliffs by the sea. The great Atlantic rollers are coming in with their messages from the far-off west; and the rising wind is singing the songs of mystery across distances of untravelled land and boundless spaces of barren sea. The spray dashes up as the billows strike the cliff and the coast-land, and there comes to us from the spray, from the wind, from the distance, the sense of freshness and freedom.

It was with a feeling like this that Vincent, after his five months' absence, caught sight, from the deck of a Neapolitan steamer, of the wide, many-coloured reaches of his beloved Campagna. He could not help thinking of the last terrible voyage that he had had to Civita Vecchia, with all its disastrous consequences; but he had accepted the inevitable, and bravely breasted his trouble; and when we have passed through a great sorrow, and when

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that sorrow has been bravely borne, the places which are the scenes and symbols of our suffering become in a sense sacred to us, and acquire an unspeakable tenderness, like the graves of dear dead friends. There was his Campagna, and in the distance his beloved Rome, the home of his struggle, his work and his victory, and these brought him the sense of freshness and freedom which he had never felt in the soft beauty of Sicily, much less amidst the noise and trenchant colour of Naples. But there also was the false Mediterranean, carrying always the memory of that mysterious shipwreck, which had also been the shipwreck of his hopes in life.

In a true heart a great sorrow never really dies, and there were moments when on the deck of the steamer as they approached Civita Vecchia, although Will felt the excitement of the spray and land breeze—which a true seaman always feels —yet the momentary pleasure was dashed by a sense of tragedy which filled his heart with tears, as he remembered the trial of his old love and his great sorrow, and there rose before him, in the vividness of her young beauty, the image of Lady May. But Will—like men who really feel life—never for long surrendered himself to the power of dreams. And indeed if he had been inclined to dreaming, the conditions

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of a landing at Civita Vecchia, and those stern necessities which are forced upon us by the management of luggage, and the care he was obliged to take for his father, who was far from better by his months of travel, tended to dispel all dreams.

They were soon in Rome again, and the doctor was glad to be in the old house in the Via Sistina. Medical men have a way of advising invalids to travel; but medical men, like others, are apt to be victims of idols of the cave and other idols, and as a matter of fact invalids are usually much better at home. The doctor, in truth, did become much better by finding himself again in Rome; and certainly Will was thankful to be there. He had accumlated a large number of sketches and studies, and he longed to be at work in his studio. He longed even more to see something of his various *protégés*, and to take up the thread of intercourse with his friends.

His first visit was to put things right in his studio, and his next to the Palazzo Spoleto. He found the Marchesa as sweet and attractive as ever, and over-joyed to see him; but he could not help noticing a certain amount of mischievous fun about her which he found it difficult to interpret.

It was still Lent; and when the first Sunday came Will made his Communion as usual at the English church, and in the

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afternoon walked down with Count Corti, who had found him out, to hear the great preacher at the Gesù.

The Padre Baldocchi was even more splendid than usual; the church was crowded to excess, and Will and his companion had to find seats on a broad marble balustrade which fenced off a little chapel almost opposite the pulpit from the main body of the church. The Padre's sermon was on "Faithfulness," he dwelt on the beauty of faithfulness in simple homes, in the ordinary work of man with man, in the deeper loves of human life, and above all in the relation of the soul to God; and he wound up with a magnificent peroration addressed to the Divine Presence of "Him Who is faithful and true," in the Blessed Sacrament enshrined in the tabernacle. The audience were spell-bound, and among them Will and even his light-hearted companion. Then followed the Service of the Benediction, that most picturesque and attractive devotion of the Roman Church.

As the vast congregation streamed out of the church, Vincent took his way, with Count Corti, up the steps of the Capitol, and along the street which skirts the Foro Romano in the direction of the Arch of Constantine. Count Corti had been evidently moved, and they discussed the sermon with great seriousness as they

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walked towards the Colosseum. In passing near the Church of Santa Francesca Romana, they noticed that people were streaming in. Will had always loved the story of that beautiful Saint, who is the image and embodiment of faithful prayer, and he proposed that they should enter.

They found that there was taking place the Devotion of the Quarant' Ore. The body of the church was almost dark; the altar was ablaze with candles; and the Sacred Host was in the monstrance; the church was crammed with worshippers, and there was perfect silence. Vincent and Count Corti dropped upon their knees, and the former at least was soon buried in real worship and prayer. They had remained some minutes in this state of quietude, when Will, suddenly raising his eyes, saw a figure before him which made him start and forget everything. She was robed in black, and she was on her knees; her hands were clasped, but the head was raised and turned somewhat, so that the light falling upon it from the altar, made him clearly see it in profile. He had never seen but one face like that; for a moment or two he gazed spellbound, then the head was turned away, and fell again in prayer. He could not bear it, it was a mere delusion to disturb and distress him; he rose from his knees, and

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touched Count Corti, who was kneeling beside him, and they left the church.

It was still a glorious evening, one of those quiet days at the end of March, when Spring, having conquered Winter, is daringly beckoning Summer to come on, and prove who can conquer. The lower heavens were a flame with gold, the upper shot across with mysterious opal lights; the scent of flowers from the Palatine was upon the breeze, and the ruins and the arches took a glow from the setting sun such as they never take except in Rome. They wandered on together slowly towards the Lateran, and from the steps of the great church they watched, as Will had often watched, the effects of light from the dying day, and of shadow from the coming night, along the line of the Alban hills.

Corti was very talkative, he rambled on about the sermon, which had affected him; about the vision of the half-lighted church; about religious and philosophical questions; but he could extract little from his friend save monosyllabic answers, and as they parted at Trevi, and stopped for a few minutes to listen to the soothing flow of the fountain,—

"You are in a dreamland, Vincent," suddenly he said; "the artist is a dreamer, only occasionally awake. I found you awake this afternoon, but you have re-

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lapsed into your land of dreams; there is nothing more to be got out of you; good-night, *amico mio*, good-night."

"I am sorry," Will answered; "I am tired," and then they parted.

As Will wandered up the Via Tritone, he was musing of many things. How strange it was, he thought, that that vision should haunt him so! it must have been the effect of imagination; it was only some ordinary Roman lady; and yet as he passed the door of his uncle's house and walked on backwards and forwards in the direction of the Pincian, to enjoy the soft air of the pleasant Roman night, he was overwhelmed with the sense that he had had a vision of his now sweet May—fairer even than his "Lyric Love"—transfigured by sorrow and rapt in prayer.

The following morning he found a note from the Marchesa, telling him not to call upon her until after Easter, as she and some friends were leaving Rome for her Alban villa during the approaching Holy Week, and inviting him at the same time to a great entertainment with which she assured him she intended to dazzle Roman society in the week after Low Sunday.

"I am sick of crushing and struggling," she wrote, "to assist at what your English friends are pleased to call 'the ceremonies.' I have a devout friend with me who desires to keep her Holy Week in peace, so I am

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flying to my own little church in the Alban hills."

In spite of the crush for the "ceremonies," Will had a happy enough Holy Week in Rome. He had a settled love for what was good and beautiful in the Roman Church; and he had now an equally settled conviction, that—while her pretence to be the *whole* Catholic Church was entirely without foundation—everything in her that was truly Catholic was his possession, as he was a member of God's great family, quite as much as the possession of the most devout member of the Latin Communion to be found in Rome.

The Roman Church possesses some of the greatest preachers and some of the worst in the world; and before now Vincent had been the victim of theatrical preachers who had apparently learnt every syllable that they said by heart, and played off on the most sacred subjects entirely fictitious passion. He was more fortunate this Holy Week; in the church of San Francesco he attended the devotion of the "Three Hours," and it was conducted by a Dominican monk possessed of real sanctity and considerable eloquence. The Roman Church in her better moods deserves the love of all true Christians, she holds up a splendid supernatural ideal, and she lifts the soul into the higher heights

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of love and devotion towards the great realities of another world which rise far above the clang of the miserable controversies in which she has so often involved Christendom.

Vincent had a happy Holy Week, and at his Communion in the English church he lost all sense of the saddening divisions of Christendom in the deeper sense of that Divine Presence which is a common joy to us all.

On the Wednesday after Low Sunday he attended duly at the Palazzo Spoleto. The Marchesa had kept her word. All Rome seemed to be there, with representatives of that composite and attractive society with which the Marchesa had succeeded in surrounding herself. No one could have dreamed that the city was not far off the extreme edge of Revolution. Room after room was crowded with guests, and the Marchesa seemed to be everywhere. She received Vincent with the greatest delight, and after a moment or two of conversation in which again he noticed the mischievous merriment that had struck him before, she passed him on to old friends whom he was glad to meet after so long an absence.

He soon found himself in the course of the evening at the doors of the conservatory; it was necessarily small, but ex-

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tremely beautiful: and the arrangement of towering ferns and exotic plants gave it an appearance of extension which it did not actually possess. There were a few soft couches beneath the taller plants, and from the open windows there came a pleasant air, refreshing after the heat of the crowded rooms; there was also the sound of water rippling from a fountain which played in the midst.

Vincent advanced, intending to rest himself on one of the couches, when he became conscious that the conservatory, which had appeared to him to be empty, was not actually tenantless. There was one solitary figure; it was the figure of a lady; she was dressed completely in black, and wore ornaments of diamonds; the face was very pale, and the head was crowned with clusters of hair of golden brown; she was lying back on the sofa, as if tired; and as her head rested on the cushions, the fan that moved slowly in her hand did not conceal the face, upon which the light fell; her eyes were closed, and as Vincent came in full view of her, he had time to gaze for a moment without being observed. He did gaze, and at the first glance he felt a shock such as he had never felt for years. It was no dream, it was a certain reality, it was Lady May. In another moment she had opened her eyes, and those eyes met

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Vincent's. For an instant her pale cheek grew a shade paler, and then she rose to her feet and came to meet him. "What a queenly woman she was!" so he thought in that passing instant, no longer the beautiful girl that he had known at Stafferton, but infinitely more beautiful, far transcending his "Lyric Love," with that face marked by self-mastery and sorrow.

She held out her hand to him with an easy grace.

"Mr. Vincent, surely," she said; "I am so glad to see you!"

The revulsion of feeling was tremendous, Vincent was in a delirium of joy, and he found it hard to control himself, and his voice trembled as he tried to answer quietly,—

"I am glad to meet you again, Lady May."

They sat down upon the couch again, and talked together with the quiet determination with which people do talk when their real feelings are suddenly aroused, and must be controlled. They spoke of the commonplace things of the moment, and asked and explained how they both happened to be in Rome.

"I did not know that you were likely to be here," Lady May said; "the Marchesa told me that you had gone to Sicily."

"I hope our meeting is not a disappoint-

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ment to you," Vincent allowed himself to say, "I had no idea that you were here. Had I thought that my coming would have pained you, nothing would have induced me to come."

He had hardly known what to say, and he felt embarrassed; but women are much more ready at such times than men are, and he was put at his ease immediately by Lady May's frank and quiet answer,—

"Not in the least, I am always glad to see old friends."

"I had forgotten," Vincent went on after a moment, "I had forgotten to ask for your husband; is he well? is he here to-night?"

There was a dreadful pause, and then Lady May spoke in a very low voice,—

"You do not know, then, you have not heard? My husband died, died by a terrible accident nearly two years ago."

"I am so sorry!" was all that Vincent could answer; "I beg your pardon; I had never heard a word of it; pray forgive me!"

"I think it is time that I should be going," Lady May said. "I am staying with Lady Dorothy in the Via Rasella. I suppose you have seen her to-night?"

"No, indeed I have not, I did not even know she was in Rome."

They rose and walked together towards

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the door of the conservatory, and there they met Lady Dorothy herself.

"Oh, dear Mr. Vincent, I am so glad to see you!" she said, holding out both her hands. "You have found Lady May, then it is a real meeting of old friends, is not it, sweet May?"

But Lady May, who looked very pale, answered not a word.—"Come, dear," she went on, "you look deadly tired. As for me, I am as hot as Vesuvius in this stifling crowd; give me your arm, Mr. Vincent, and take me to my carriage," and in another moment Vincent found himself leading Lady Dorothy through the crowded rooms and down the staircase, followed by Lady May.

"You and the Marchesa have treated me very badly," he said in a low voice to her as they descended the staircase into the courtyard, "you have never told me a word of all this."

"We have treated you uncommonly well," was all the answer that he got, "unless you are a greater noodle than I take you for."

He handed Lady May into the carriage, and then Lady Dorothy.

"You will come and see me to-morrow, won't you?" Lady Dorothy said to him as he said his good-night; but he did not answer her, he only stretched across to

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take Lady May's hand, and as he did so he said,—

"May I call upon you to-morrow, or would you rather not?"

"You may," she answered, and in another moment the carriage was gone.

When Lady Dorothy stood by Lady May for a moment in the bedroom, where the former was saying good-night, she took her in her arms and kissed her, and Lady May's head fell upon her shoulder and she burst into an agony of tears.

"Oh, Dorothy, Dorothy!" she said, "you ought to have told me; how could you be so unkind?"

"I ought to have done nothing of the sort, my sweet; you have both of you behaved as well as two people could; why can't you be happy? What nonsense!" and she kissed her again and again.

"Oh! Dorothy, Dorothy!" was all that Lady May could answer with choking sobs, and then they parted.

When Vincent called the following afternoon at the Via Rasella, he found Lady May alone. It was an old Italian room, wainscoted to the ceiling, but with its natural gloom much relieved by pretty flowers and various knick-knacks imported by Lady Dorothy. There was no view from the windows except of a high wall,

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marked off at intervals by large jars in which were planted spiky cactuses which stood out against the sky beyond.

Lady May was seated and at work in one of the windows, and when he entered she came to meet him, they sat down opposite one another in the deep window, and Vincent expressed, in a reserved and awkward way, his pleasure at meeting again; then there was a dead silence, and at last Vincent spoke.

"May," he said, and he rose from his seat and stood beside her as he spoke, "if I am wrong or if I hurt your feelings, you must stop me at once; but you know I can only come here for one object, to ask you, may we be again as once we were?"

She was still quite silent, and the work dropped from her hands.

"Answer me, May," he said; "everything depends upon your answer, for me."

"A great deal has happened since those days," she answered him, and her voice was very low and trembling.

"Oh, May! May! my own love, my only love," and his arm stole round her as he spoke, "a great deal *has* happened to both of us, of duty and suffering. I was all unworthy of you then, I am all unworthy of

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you now; but can you not love me? will you not love me as you loved me once long ago?"

She sprang to her feet, and looked up at him straight in his face.

"Will, Will," she said, "I do love you, love you with my whole heart."

He took her in his arms and kissed and kissed her. "My own sweet May," he said, "then no one can part us now. You are a little happy, my little one, are you not?"

"Oh, Will," she said, "I am very, very happy!" and she laid her head upon his breast and sobbed her heart out.

They were very happy with a happiness well deserved, and they have been very happy ever since; and she did not love him less when she found that he was the real "Child of Stafferton," and that property and title had been all renounced by him to give her all he could of peace in her day of trial.

There is another "Child of Stafferton" now, and no more ghosts haunt the old Court, but when the heather is bright and when the beck is dancing through the village, there are heard the voices of happy children by the beck side in the evening or over the moors on the summer day, which often make glad the

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old rooms of Stafferton Court, and gladder still the hearts of such parents as Sir William Durrell and Lady May, his wife. And the evening of Dr. Pendrell's life is a happy evening, cared for and loved, as ever, by the son he had loved so faithfully, and rejoicing now as "The Grandpater" with the sons of that son upon his knees. And the country-folk at Heath Cross and at Stafferton, though they occasionally miss the master and mistress when they pay short visits to Gubbio and to Rome, have no reason to regret the years of trouble which taught Sir William and his wife that one of the best guiding principles in our changeful mortal pilgrimage is to act as followers of Christ should act, and, in the faith and fear of God, "To be unselfish and to help other people."

When Ravensthorpe gave me back the MSS., he remarked that one of the oddest things in life is, that we may be so mixed up with tragedies and sorrows in other lives and yet remain in happy unconsciousness of such strange stories so close to ourselves. He said that I had scarcely done justice to the character of his dear aunt, Lady Dorothy, in which I think he was perfectly right; and the only excuse that I could advance was that I was not engaged in writing her history; but he

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also added that he now understood more clearly than he had ever done before, why he always felt more ashamed of his own selfishness, and felt better and happier too for being with Sir William and Lady May Durrell, and why we had always agreed that the pleasantest house to be in which was known to either of us was Stafferton Court.

THE END.

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